

**Whose Decision? A Longitudinal Study of Influences on the  
Decision-Making process during the  
Transition from School of Twelve Young People  
with Special Educational Needs**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the experiences of twelve young people with a range of special educational needs and their families during the transition from school, and the influences upon them. Despite a growing mainstream literature on the processes of career decision-making, little attention has been paid to the experiences of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at this point in their lives. An interpretative, longitudinal approach to the research design was adopted and data were collected through a combination of interviews, questionnaires and observations. The author argues that rather than the logical model of decision-making assumed by much national policy, the process is often messy, complex and unpredictable. A typology of decision-making processes is proposed. The study goes on to explore both the influences on and influence of the main participants directly involved in the decision-making process: the young people, their parents or carers, the professionals. Of all those involved, young people with learning difficulties were least likely to have their views heard or responded to. Equally, the coping mechanisms of parents, who were often central to the decision-making process, were not well recognised or understood by the professionals charged with providing support. It appears that where young people or parents found difficulty in asserting their preferences, serendipitous or chance events provided the vehicles through which they could exercise their wills, so that decisions were made despite rather than because of the formal decision-making procedures. Overall, the influences on young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are similar to those that influence non-disabled young people, but insufficient account is taken of these in providing support and guidance.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **The Social, Economic and Legislative Context**

#### **Background**

The impetus for this study arose from my observation in the late 1980s that young people with apparently very similar, special needs living in similar localities headed for very different destinations at 16. Why was this? After all, the two schools that the pupils had attended were locationally close to one another and they both took pupils who had been assessed as having moderate learning difficulties. Yet, while the majority of pupils from the first school left at 16 and continued on to the local college most pupils from the other school either went to the school's further education unit, got jobs or joined a youth training scheme. These very different destination patterns suggested that a number of different influences were at work and that decisions were not necessarily led by the needs and aspirations of the individual or their families. At the outset of this investigation, I therefore speculated that the attitudes of professionals and micro-political considerations such as funding or inter-institutional rivalries were factors in the decision-making process.

The enquiry took place between 1995 and 1998 against a background of continuing changes in the labour market. Labour market changes have considerable knock-on effects for all school leavers and it is a major contention of this thesis that the influences affecting the decisions about post-school destinations of young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are not substantially different from those affecting their non-disabled peers. These factors are discussed below, drawing on the UK literature from the last two decades to the present. The other significant contextual factor has been the implementation of the 1994 Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994) which among other things offered guidance on the conduct of the transition from school of young people with statements of special educational needs. This general discussion provides some background to a more extensive examination of the literature relating to decision-making at the school

leaving stage and the constraints that govern the process for all young people as well as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. I begin, however, by defining what is meant by disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

### **The target group**

The young people who are the focus of this study had all been identified by the school system as having special educational needs, that is they each required some form of additional support as a result of learning, behavioural or physical difficulties or impairments. The extent to which these difficulties are internal to the individual, as opposed to resulting from factors within the environment, is the subject of ongoing debate and conjecture. However, most commentators now accept that special educational needs result from an interaction between individual characteristics and the environment and that through changing or modifying external factors difficulties can be reduced or removed. The relative and contextual nature of special educational needs is highlighted as young people move from education to employment, as some young people who may have experienced difficulties at school are absorbed into the labour market with relative ease. Of course, this is not always the case but, nevertheless, it is important to recognise that labels applied in one context may have very little meaning or relevance in another. For the purposes of clarity the term 'special educational needs' is used when referring to school-age pupils but disability and/or learning difficulties to those over school age.

### **The labour market and its effects on post-school destinations**

During the mid- to late-twentieth century there have been seismic shifts in the nature of the labour market. Until the 1970s the concept of work remained relatively stable but then a number of factors combined to challenge the old order including the growth of technology, the erosion of the manufacturing base of the economy, the loss of trade union power and influence and the growth of the global economy. In the nineties, Hutton (1995) described British society as having become the 30, 30, 40 society. By this he meant that 30% of the UK adult working population were unemployed or economically inactive; 30% were on short-term contracts with limited or non-existent benefits; while only 40% were in permanent, full-time work with pensions, sick pay and so on. While the degree of unemployment, however defined, has almost certainly

fallen, uncertainty or flexibility, depending on your point of view, is likely to remain a characteristic of the labour market. The full extent of these changes and the underlying reasons are far-reaching and extensive and lie beyond the scope of this study. What is of interest and concern here are the effects of these changes on the nature of youth transitions and destination patterns and, in particular, on young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Twenty-five years ago approximately 20% of 16 year-olds remained in full-time education while the rest entered the labour market sometimes combining this with part-time study (Fogelman, 1983). However, in the late seventies and early eighties concerns grew about youth unemployment and low staying-on rates in the United Kingdom as compared to those in other developed countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1977), and steps were taken to increase participation in post-16 education and training opportunities.

While most young people leaving school in the early to mid-seventies were likely to enter employment, the destinations for young people with special educational needs were often different but, in many ways, equally predictable. The Warnock Committee (1978) noted that, 'people with special needs are often unemployed or under-employed, simply because they are not provided with the right help at the right time', and that school leavers with moderate learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties could easily hold down a job with minimal extra support (p.163).

The Warnock Report acted as a trigger to two of the earliest studies into the experiences of young people with special educational needs entering the labour market (Walker, 1982; Anderson and Clark, 1982). Both concluded that school leavers required more education and training opportunities as well as more support in combating the high level of social isolation and psychological problems experienced by many in their late teens and early twenties.

Walker (*ibid*) compared the destinations of 393 school leavers with a wide range of special educational needs, identified by using Warnock's one in five definition of



young people likely to require additional support, and compared their post-school destinations to a control group of 115. He found that the same number of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as those who were non-disabled were employed at 18 (66%). However, while the remainder of those without disabilities were in some form of education and training, their disabled peers were unemployed or attending Social Services Day Centres. Furthermore, the majority of those with special needs who were working had semi-skilled or unskilled jobs and had experienced more periods of unemployment. When these figures are disaggregated to take account of the degree of special support young people were receiving, just under 50% of those who had been formally assessed as having special needs were employed and the rest were at home or attending day centres. He concluded that changes were needed both within education and the labour market. Remaining in education should not be based on selection and should be made more possible and more attractive.

Anderson and Clarke's (*ibid*) research demonstrated the even greater disadvantages experienced by those with physical disabilities post-school. They followed 119 children with cerebral palsy and spina bifida over three years between the ages of 15 to 18 to cover the point of leaving school. None of these students had significant difficulties in learning. A control group of 33 were drawn from the same mainstream schools attended by some of the physically disabled pupils. Eighteen months after leaving school, of the 51 whom they were still in contact with, a third were in open employment, a quarter were at college and the rest were at home or attending day centres. The researchers found the incidence of psychological problems and social isolation to be four times higher among the study group than the control group. They also found a considerable lack of knowledge among the young people themselves about the nature of their disability and the availability of support services.

A follow-up study by Clark and Hirst (1989) examined what had happened to these same young people by the time they had reached the ages of 25 to 30 and, again, compared their findings to a non-disabled control group. One third of respondents did not return their questionnaires and the sample contained a disproportionate number of women and severely disabled people, so that the conclusions have to be treated with

caution. Even so, a broadly similar proportion were in employment as in the control group. However, most were still living at home and had not achieved their aspirations of marriage and children as compared to the general population. Those who aspired to live independently knew very little about how they could achieve this. Clarke and Hirst (*op. cit.*) concluded that the variations in the lives of the individuals could 'not be accounted for by type and severity of disablement suggesting that other factors were important (p.282).' They did not, however, go on to speculate about the nature of these factors.

The marked drop in the numbers entering open employment between these studies and that of Ward, Riddell, Dyer and Thomson (1991) and the increasing numbers remaining in continuing education and training reflect a general trend throughout the 1980s in post-16 destinations. Ward *et al.* (*ibid*) tracked the destinations of 619 school leavers with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities up to the age of 20. During the course of the two-year study, 9% entered open employment, 31% were in continuing education and training (including 65 at school), 22% were lost to the researchers and the remaining 38% were in day centres or unemployed. Ward *et al.* reported that type of disability was loosely linked to young people's most probable route on leaving school, so that those with physical disabilities alone were most likely to enter paid employment.

A number of other longitudinal studies have also noted the fall in numbers amongst young people with moderate learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties entering open employment. Atkinson (1984), May and Hughes (1985), Freshwater and Leyden (1989), Armstrong and Davies (1995), and Kidd and Hornby (2001) all followed the fortunes of small groups of school leavers with moderate learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties, many of whom in the past would have been absorbed into the labour market. Whereas Atkinson (*ibid*) found that 80% of his cohort of male 45 to 51 year-olds were in open employment and had been in the same job for more than 20 years, Freshwater and Leyden (*ibid*) found a very different picture, reflecting the wider trends in the transitional years. Of the 47 pupils whom they managed to trace three years after leaving school, the majority were unemployed and 52% had never had a job. May and Hughes (*ibid*) followed what

happened to 63 school leavers with moderate learning difficulties over 22 months and found that they experienced increasingly long periods of unemployment and lack of contact with the support services. Armstrong and Davies' study (*ibid*) notes the particular vulnerability of youngsters returning to their home locality having attended residential schools. They may have been returning to the source of their initial problems, they lacked contact with local services and they were likely to have limited knowledge of local opportunities. A similarly gloomy picture is painted by Hornby and Kidd (*ibid*) whose study ten years on of 24 pupils with moderate learning difficulties who had transferred from special to mainstream school found that the vast majority were unemployed. It would appear, then, that the changes in the labour market have had a particularly profound effect on the chances of employment of this group of youngsters and that, whatever attempts are being made to create a more inclusive school system, society is in fact becoming *less* inclusive.

What has been the effect of labour market changes on those who, in the past, rarely entered open employment? Problems arise because different services use different definitions of what constitutes a learning difficulty or disability, making comparisons difficult, but in short there appears to have been little change to Walker's (*op. cit.*) findings of nearly 20 years ago. Employment statistics are generally based on medical criteria. According to the Labour Force Survey of 1999, disabled people are only half as likely as non-disabled people to be in employment. When this figure is broken down, however, only 23% of people with learning difficulties are employed while others such as those with hearing impairments, diabetes or skin conditions have a relatively high employment rate (around 65%). This picture is supported by Hirst and Baldwin's (1994) research, also using a medical definition of disability, which showed that disabled young people were three times as likely as their non-disabled peers to be attending day centres or to be at home looking for work or to have no activity. Having said that, there has been a growth in numbers of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities going on to further education courses (FEFC, 1996) and youth training (Labour Market Trends 1993, 1996) as well as an increase in the availability of supported employment schemes (Hughes and Kingsford, 1997). The extent to which these opportunities enhance young people's abilities to enter the labour market in the longer term, however, is more doubtful and the need to define

the purpose of many of these education and training programmes becomes more pressing.

### **Attaining adult status**

By the late eighties and early nineties the period of transition from childhood to adulthood had become both more extended and more complex, a fact demonstrated by the longitudinal national youth cohort study. The study, which began in 1984, monitors the destination patterns of successive cohorts of 16 year-olds, tracking them for up to three years. The findings showed a steady growth in numbers entering full-time education and a steady fall in those entering employment or youth training (Payne, Cheng & Witherspoon, 1996). By 1994 the percentage of 16 year-olds staying on in post-compulsory education and training had risen to 70% (House of Commons Education Committee, 1996).

A study by Banks, Bates, Breakwell, Bynner, Elmer, Jamieson and Roberts (1992) demonstrates the effects of these trends on young people's self-esteem. They conducted an enquiry into the relationship between the formation of self-identity and career patterns of 1,200 16 to 20 year-olds over three years. 'Career' was defined very broadly as the 'entry into and progress through the labour market' and into 'domestic life, leisure and politics' (p.8). Overall they found that the period of education before entering employment had been gradually extended throughout the twentieth century although the points at which young people marry or have children have not shown the same degree of change.

The extent to which the young people in Banks *et al.*'s study had some control over the choices open to them had an effect on how they felt about themselves. Their survey showed that about one third of their sample followed two-year academic/vocational programmes; 10% were on one-year general vocational courses; 10 - 30%, depending on locality, went straight from school into work while another quarter went from school to youth training schemes and thence to work. The remainder were on a mixture of education or youth training programmes or were unemployed. Those who chose to remain in education and training generally portrayed a more positive self-image than those who were on youth training schemes.

The latter group were unable to get a job and training was therefore involuntary. Banks *et al.* concluded that changes in the labour market are more likely to have negative effects on young people with low levels of school achievement coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds and that disadvantage is concentrated within groups in particular localities. Most importantly, they identified the importance of feelings of self-control and self-worth in influencing career path and the inter-relationship between these feelings and educational attainment, race, gender and class.

As well as delayed entry into the labour market, there have also been changes in the benefits system so that the ages at which young people can qualify for unemployment and housing benefits has been raised. Again, it is young people from lower socio-economic brackets who are likely to be hardest hit and Jones (1995) explored the extent to which their increased dependence on their families for financial support has created additional and in some cases unbearable pressures on families, which in turn has contributed to homelessness among young people.

Extended educational opportunities, which have replaced jobs for many young people, do provide some markers of adulthood including social networks, living away at university, part-time work. However, for others in the cohort, including some young people with special educational needs who in the past may have got work, the net effect has meant that many young people are now more dependent on their families for longer and the point at which they can afford to leave the family home is delayed. This in turn means that it takes longer for these young people to attain what may be regarded as the traditional markers of adulthood, e.g. living independently, developing social networks, economic self-sufficiency.

As we have already seen, therefore, the result of labour market changes has been to delay the point at which young people become economically self-sufficient. However, these effects are not uniformly negative as access to continuing education and training should in the long run increase their capacity to obtain better-paid and more satisfying jobs. Banks *et al.* (*op. cit.*) describe young people as being at the centre of 'vicious and virtuous circles, pulling young people towards different destinations' (p.105). Those disadvantaged by the process are generally from poor or socially disadvantaged

backgrounds with lower levels of educational attainment, live in areas with fewer opportunities and have lower feelings of self-efficacy. The speed at which individuals attain the 'markers' of adult status will thus differ depending on their educational attainments, the nature of their post 16 education and their stage of entry into the labour market.

What adult status actually means in practice is open to considerable debate and may vary according to context, culture or at a personal level. Jones and Wallace (1992) regard adult status as having different meanings in different *contexts*. They divide the markers of adulthood into three types: private, e.g. first menstrual period, first alcoholic drink; public, e.g. leaving home, getting engaged; and official, e.g. graduation, passing the driving test. When these markers are attained will require recognition in each of these different contexts but will also vary between individuals. However, they argue that the ability to claim one's rights as a citizen, such as being able to drive, marry or claim housing benefit, is dependent on economic status. As career patterns become more extended and more diverse it becomes increasingly difficult to define adulthood in legal and social terms. They propose that the definition of adult status should be defined in terms of access, as well as rights, to citizenship.

Different cultural traditions illustrate the relative nature of the concept of adulthood. For example, while leaving home to live independently before marriage is considered perfectly normal in English society, other cultures do not expect their children to leave home until they marry. There are also subcultural definitions. Some commentators have argued that young people create their own markers of adult status through, for example, having a child to compensate for their lack of economic self-sufficiency or obtaining illegal employment. Wilkinson (1995) cites a report by Ann Clwyd, the then shadow Employment Minister, in which she reported that 75% of the 2 million school children in employment were illegally employed.

These debates about adult status, however, do not fully capture the issues surrounding adult status and its attainment by young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), argued through

its various reports over a ten-year period that many disabled people were never recognised as adults. The various reports attempted to define the nature of adult status and in 1986 CERI defined the characteristics of adult life as:

*'employment, useful work and valued activity;*  
*personal autonomy, independence and adult status;*  
*social interaction, community participation, leisure and recreation;*  
*roles within the family'. (p.16)*

In a subsequent publication (CERI, 1991) these goals are modified slightly. Employment becomes 'productive activity' and is placed second to the achievement of autonomy while adult status becomes an overarching concept which embraces each of these characteristics. Cultural and individual differences are reiterated. However, in CERI's 1994 report, there was a change of emphasis towards an inclusive policy framework governing the transition of all young people while acknowledging the differences between individuals.

Each of the CERI reports describes some of the barriers and limitations to the achievement of these goals. As well as legal limitations, barriers include lack of opportunities to socialise with peers, difficulties in separating from parents, denial of sexual identity and difficulties in entering the labour market. In line with other commentators, employment is seen as opening up the possibility of achieving a number of other adult 'markers' including widening social contacts, leaving the family home and making a contribution to society.

However, the emphasis given to employment as the main marker of adulthood for people with disabilities is open to considerable debate. CERI (1994) reiterates its earlier view, stated in 1986, that open paid employment is the only satisfactory outcome for the transition phase, however long that lasts, since it is only through this route that disabled people can achieve a satisfactory quality of life. Thus, in order to achieve 'a good life' some of the structural barriers to open employment would have to be removed. Other studies confirm the interdependence of access to employment and quality of life. Kuh (1990) found that young people with physical and sensory disabilities were three times less likely than their non-disabled peers to be employed

and that over one third had significant unmet needs in relation to their work, living and social arrangements. These results are confirmed by Hirst (1990) while Bax (1990) found considerable unmet health needs amongst 18 to 25 year-old physically disabled adults. Riddell, Ward and Thomson (1993), however, suggest that even when disabled people are employed it is often in low level and poorly paid occupations and that employment does not guarantee that they will have access to any kind of social life or opportunities to develop an independent lifestyle.

Challenges to CERI's definition of adult status have come from other quarters as well. Some critics have argued that until wider social, educational and economic disadvantages are challenged only a 'spurious form of adulthood' will be achieved (Corbett and Barton, 1992a, p.26). Others challenge the overly individualistic nature of the concept and its dependence on a predetermined, normative set of values (Morris, 1993).

The normative values which underpin CERI's definition – job, marriage, family, children – are also challenged indirectly by Karan, Lambour and Greenspaw (1990) and Holm, Hoslt and Pevlt (1994). They propose a model in which people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities identify their own 'markers' of adulthood. The quality of life movement, as it has become known, has arisen in part from the community care movement and has parallels with wider discussions about lifestyle. Initially community care was based on the premise of creating a 'normal' lifestyle for disabled people, but this notion has been challenged by those who question the right of others to determine what a valued and normal life is (Wolfensberger, 1985). In the search for ways of evaluating community care projects, researchers in the eighties rejected behavioural outcomes based on normative measures and turned instead to using a combination of objective measures such as housing, health, income as well as subjective indicators such as feelings of personal worth and contentment (Schalock, 1994).

There is a danger, however, that in relying on individuals to construct their own ideas about their lives the kind of social and structural inequalities described by Corbett and Barton (1992a, 1992b) could go unchallenged. To what extent can individual



determinism and the removal of social and structural barriers go hand in hand? One approach is to provide social policy which attempts to offset some of the dangers of the free market and which attempts to challenge or modify social attitudes and expectations.

### **The legislative and social policy context of the study**

The social policy context of the school-leaving period for young people with special educational needs is governed by educational and employment policies as well as those of health and social services. Under the 1944 Education Act, pupils with special educational needs were entitled to remain in full-time education up to the age of 19 thereby recognising that some young people with disabilities or learning difficulties required longer in education. The Warnock Report, acknowledging the disadvantages that many of these school leavers and their families then experienced after leaving the security of school, recommended that a Named Person be appointed, following the Danish 'Kurator' model, to support them and their families throughout their teens and through to the early twenties. Despite this proposal, the 1981 Education Act, which introduced new legislation on the provision of special education in schools, made no mention of the particular needs of disabled school leavers.

Throughout the eighties and early nineties legislation was passed which aimed to improve the post-school lives of disabled youth and the opportunities that were open to them. The 1986 Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act covered the arrangements for transferring responsibility for those with continuing care needs from full time education to social services provision. However, the implementation of this particular Act has been patchy and has faltered, according to the Social Services Inspectorate (1995), from lack of resources. The 1990 National Health and Community Care Act aimed to support the development of inter-agency planning at both strategic and individual levels. Local authorities and health trusts were obliged to produce three-year strategic plans which described arrangements for identifying and meeting the needs of disabled people in the community. Whereas health and social services had a statutory duty to respond, subsequent education and training legislation including the 1992 Further and Higher Education (FHE) Act and the 1993 Trade Union Reform Act, only required the Further Education Funding

Council and Training and Enterprise Councils to 'have regard to' people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They were therefore not mandated to make provision, allowing colleges and training schemes the freedom to select participants according to local demand.

The 1992 FHE Act also changed the arrangements for funding further education by removing further education colleges from local authority control and setting up the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The FEFC, through its funding formula, made additional funds available for the support of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in colleges. According to a report to the FEFC by Beachcroft Stanleys (1996) the extent to which LEAs retained a 'lingering duty' (p.41) towards students with special educational needs over the age of 16 under the 1944 Education Act is unclear. However, the Act clearly stipulated that where students with special educational needs wished to apply to colleges outside the sector, i.e. residential specialist colleges for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, it must first be shown that a local college could not meet their needs.

By the early 1990s then, there had been some attempt to address a number of different aspects of disabled adults' lives. However, the initiatives were piecemeal and ad hoc and the approach was not based on the holistic needs of the individual but referred instead to the way individual services should respond to individuals. A constant theme running throughout much of this legislation was the requirement to purchase provision made on the basis of an assessment of individual needs. It was not until the 1994 Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) that the actual process of decision-making about post-school destinations of pupils with special educational needs was recognised as worthy of particular consideration and planning.

In line with most social policy of the time the 1988 Education Act, later strengthened by the 1993 Education Act, was driven by a wish to increase control over the curriculum while at the same time introducing more competition and consumer choice into the education system. The 1994 Code of Practice, which resulted from the second of these two acts, was an attempt to safeguard pupils with special educational needs against some of the possible negative consequences of market-driven policies. It is not

within the scope of this discussion to decide how successful the Code has been in this respect. However, the inclusion of guidance on the management of the transition of young people with statements of special educational needs was no doubt influenced by the international work of the OECD/CERI on the transition of young people with special educational needs. The rationale for CERI's interest sprang, according to McGinty and Fish (1992), from national and international concerns about the generally high levels of youth unemployment and the increasing cost of welfare benefits including disability allowances. Better planning, it was argued, would increase young people's chances of entering the labour market and improve their quality of life.

The Code proposed that planning for transition should begin at the young person's 14+ annual review meeting and that an individual transition plan should be drawn up. The meeting should be convened by the local education authority and parents and the Careers Service must be invited. The plan should address the young person's aspirations and likely support needs, the contribution that each service and parents will make and the nature of the school curriculum. In line with the concept of parents and pupils as consumers, the Code stressed the involvement of young people and their parents in the decision-making process, noting in particular the need for young people to be given information about their options so that they could make informed choices. Young people should be supported to participate in the process by programmes of self-advocacy. Other services, including future providers, should be informed of any relevant information that would be useful in planning to meet the student's future requirements. The Code also reiterated the existing relevant legislation on inter-agency collaboration described above. Finally, the Code proposed that guidance could be extended to include pupils without statements but who might benefit from some more planned support as they prepare to leave school.

The guidance on transition planning was welcomed, although, compared to other aspects of the Code on the identification of children with special needs, the recommendations attracted relatively little attention from practitioners and researchers alike (Wilenius, 1996). Even OFSTED (1995) in its survey on the implementation of

the Code of Practice made scant reference to how schools and local authorities had responded to the guidance on transition.

Bowers, Dee, Wilkinson and West (1998) investigating the user-friendliness of the Code on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment concluded that while most users, including careers advisers, found the guidance useful, guidance governing the conduct of subsequent review meetings needed to be strengthened to reinforce the incremental nature of the decision-making process.

One further relevant piece of legislation is the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995, which superseded the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act of 1944. As far as employment goes, employers must not be seen to treat a person with a disability less favourably than someone without a disability and must take all reasonable steps to remove any barriers to physical access. However, the new Act was considered by many active in the disability rights movement to be a disappointment because it failed to go far enough in enabling disabled people to challenge discriminatory practices in law and this has also now been revised.

## **Conclusions**

The context in which decisions are made as young people with special educational needs approach school leaving has changed radically over the last 20 years, though the extent to which conditions have improved is harder to judge. On one hand there is a much greater awareness both in policy and provision of the rights of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to have access to continuing education and training, the need for planning and support and their right to adult status, however defined. On the other hand, pressures within the labour market, though perhaps different, seem as insuperable as ever. Opportunities for some groups who in the past gained access to open employment have been reduced, as jobs have been replaced by technology or taken by higher attaining youngsters. What is more, little attention has been given in the mainstream studies of youth and their post-school destinations as to what happens to young disabled school leavers. Given that background, I turn now to addressing some of the more immediate influences on the decisions that are taken during the final years of their secondary schooling.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Decisions and Decision-making – a Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

Following on from a consideration of the macroeconomic and social influences on young people's transition from school, this chapter considers the more immediate influences surrounding the decision task as well as considering the nature of the process itself. The focus of this review is therefore on decision-making processes and the ways that these are influenced by micro and macro decisions. However, the review also draws on a wider literature as this will impinge on the formulation of the research design, the selection of the case studies and the interpretation of the findings.

The main contention underlying this thesis is that decision-making about the post-school destinations of young people with special educational needs is not an objective process and that the influences and constraints that operate in the formulation of those decisions are not fundamentally different from those that apply to all young people. A considerable literature exists on the nature of these influences but as Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) conclude, 'There is an almost total absence of attention, in either policy or research literatures, to the ways in which those "customers" (young people) of education and training provision actually make career decisions' (p.29). This lack of understanding about these processes also extends to young people with special educational needs. As Bradley, Dee and Wilenius (1994) point out, very little is known about what happens during the transition process and how young people and their families experience the decisions that have to be made during this period of their lives. The review begins, however, by defining the relevant time span and placing the school-leaving period within the broader context of the transition to adulthood.

#### **The period in question**

The students who were the participants in this study were generally in their final years of schooling although a few left school in the middle of the project. The final years of

secondary schooling are seen by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (1986) as the first part of the transition of young people towards adulthood. Transition in general, according to McGinty and Fish (1992), is:

*'... a phase or period of time between the teens and twenties which is broken up educationally and administratively. During the phase there are changes of responsibility from child to adult services, from school to further and higher education and from childhood dependence to adult responsibility.*

*... a process by which the individual grows through adolescence to adulthood and achieves the balanced state of dependence and independence which a particular community expects of its adult members' (p.6).*

Using McGinty and Fish's definition of transition, the time period in question is governed by the guidance set out in the 1994 Code of Practice (DfE) which has already been described. The young people left school at a number of different points between their 16th and 19th birthdays, although in two instances students left school before their official leaving dates. Changes of responsibility for their education shifted from the local education authorities to the further education sector as well as, in some instances, for their care needs from child to adult services, while others moved outside the remit of any of the support services.

The psychosocial changes that the young people experienced were part of a much longer, more dynamic and complex process and it is the nature of these processes, the influences upon them and their relationship to decision-making during the final years of school that forms the substantial part of this literature review.

### **What sort of decisions are made?**

We have already seen that the future for many young people is a very uncertain one, arising partly from changes in the labour market. While the focus of this study is on decisions about young people's immediate destination on leaving school, these decisions need to be seen within the context of a wider and more general preparation for adulthood which, as Bradley *et al.* (*op. cit.*) point out, is seen by most commentators as being broader than preparation solely for work. Thus, whether a student goes to a residential college or the local college, for example, will probably

influence their friendships and social networks, their degree of independence and maybe what they choose to do next. Indeed Levine and Nourse's (1998) critique of 13 major follow-up sub-surveys arising from the US's National Longitudinal Transition Survey (NLTS) concluded that there was too much emphasis on employment and what are required are more qualitative studies which examine the quality of young people's lives against a broader range of outcomes.

According to the literature, there are three main categories of influence on decisions: influences emanating from social attitudes and expectations; the immediate influences brought by the main decision-makers themselves to the process; and wider influences such as local opportunities, peer groups and friendship networks and the media.

### **The influence of social attitudes and expectations**

Most career learning theorists agree that post-school destinations are influenced by society's attitudes towards an individual's class, gender and race, although there are differences of opinion about the extent to which each of these factors predetermine an individual's career path and subsequent lifestyle. On the whole, however, disability is missing as a factor in all the mainstream investigations of identity and post-school destinations, as it is from most sociological theory (Abberley cited in Riddell, 1993).

In 1983, the National Child Development Study noted 'the strong relationship found by other researchers between future plans and background variables such as social class parental education' (Fogelman, 1983, p.278). Research by Roberts (1971) and Willis (1977) concluded that choices are determined by class and that family background is more influential than abilities in determining career paths and job choice, an outcome perpetuated by lack of opportunities in education and the labour market. In a later study, however, Gambetta (1987) concluded that the dominant model was one of individual determinism, but that some young people, particularly those from middle class homes, were more successful than others in fulfilling their aspirations. Those from the middle classes were sometimes pushed too much while others from working class homes did not receive the support they required.

Willis's work in particular has been criticised for its failure to take account of gender and ethnicity as two further factors in explaining career paths. Brooks (1998) in a survey of relevant literature concluded that most commentators agree that gender plays a significant part in determining post-16 options and subsequent career paths. For example, girls are far more likely than boys to stay on at school even when attainment has been accounted for, a fact confirmed by Payne *et al.* (1996). Gender differences are according to Gaskell (1992) reproduced through schooling and what young men and women observe happening in society at large. Many young women are resigned to their future roles as being responsible for domestic arrangements and their job as being secondary to that of the man. Furthermore, more girls than boys are likely to disappear from the labour market through pregnancy, a fact also noted by Wilkinson (1995) in his study of youth in the North East of England in which he noted, 'There is strong evidence that a combination of negative attitudes and domestic pressures (including pregnancy) militates against either looking for work in the first place or keeping a job once it has been obtained' (p. 66).

Although ethnicity has also been identified as important in shaping individual identity and career path, Brooks (*op. cit.*) concluded that differences in destinations were more likely to be explained by attainment than ethnicity. This would point to disadvantage within the school system although this still does not fully explain the high levels of unemployment particularly among Afro-Caribbean youth identified by the Youth Cohort Study (Park, 1994). However, Asian youth, whatever their backgrounds, have high aspirations and tend to stay longer in education than other groups from similar backgrounds.

None of this research, however, attempts to explain the patterns of employment and the relationship with their lifestyles of young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties described in the introduction to this study. I have already described in Chapter 1 how shifts in the nature of the labour market have had a considerable impact on those school leavers defined as having moderate learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties, limiting their chances of getting a job, but that those with more complex needs have always been at a disadvantage in the labour market compared to those without. In 1978 Warnock argued for the concept of



‘significant living without work’ and promoted the idea that some people with disabilities will never be able to work but can nevertheless contribute to society in alternative ways. However, Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) propose that ‘in our society ... work is central to inclusion’ (p.7). If we accept Ball *et al.*’s proposition, then many young people identified as having special educational needs leaving school today are even more likely to be excluded from society than they were 20 years ago. The reasons for this increasing marginalisation of some youngsters in the labour market can largely be explained by changes in the economy, but are other social forces at work?

In CERI’s (1986) international study of transition, attitudes of others towards disabled young people emerged as a major barrier to their achievement of adult status. The report argued that the degree of handicap experienced by a disabled young person was determined by the attitudes of those they encountered at school, in society at large and in employment, who often saw disabled people as locked into some kind of perpetual childhood. Low expectations coupled with ignorance combined to sustain the status quo. In addition, the report noted that, since a dependent state is easier to manage, it was simpler to make decisions for young people than engage with them in the decision-making processes. Thus, even if they had aspirations or fears for the future they were afforded no opportunities to realise them.

Yet the aspirations, experiences and problems of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities during the transition period are not fundamentally different from those of all young people. Flynn and Hirst (1992) found, for example, a good deal of common ground in what young people aspired to but that young disabled people were restricted in the realisation of their aspirations by the lack of imagination displayed by support services in discharging their responsibilities. They concluded that efforts should be made to facilitate the formation of social networks in the community which in turn can assist in the processes of socialisation, widening horizons and informing aspirations. Limited access to employment further limits social networks and opportunities to build self-esteem and identity. Two groups in particular are identified as being at a disadvantage: young women and those with complex needs who are dependent on their families for any kind of social contact.

This study was a subset of a much larger study carried out by Hirst and Baldwin (1994). Hirst and Baldwin interviewed a sample of about 400 young people with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities and compared their experiences to those of a non-disabled control group of 726. They found a wide variation in the lives of young disabled people concluding that their disabilities did not necessarily lead to disadvantage. However, they also found that about one third of young disabled people, particularly those with severe or complex disabilities, will experience difficulties in attaining the markers of adulthood and that conditions have not improved despite potentially supportive legislation. Refining Ward *et al.*'s (1991) rather simplistic conclusion that there is a correlation between type of disability and post-school destination, they disavowed a direct link between disability and disadvantage concluding that 'the findings point to a complex relationship between impairment, social restrictions which reflect inequalities in the support and opportunities available to severely disabled young people' (p.111). They also found that the gap between the quality of life of disabled and non-disabled people widens with age, largely attributable to lack of access to employment opportunities.

They concluded that, despite some helpful legislation emphasising user views, empowerment and choice, three issues continue to dog these laudable intentions. First, a lack of inter-agency co-ordination and planning at local level; second, inadequate resources allocated to disabled people in the face of competing priorities, e.g. youth unemployment, the elderly; and, lastly, lack of a real vision of a holistic response to individual needs based on a commitment to civil rights.

The rhetoric of empowerment and choice was also challenged in a study by Riddell, Wilson and Baron (1999) who concluded that, while people with learning difficulties have the capacity to express their views about the education, training and employment services they require, in reality they have little influence when it comes to making choices. Like the earlier CERI report, Riddell *et al.* concluded that power over decision-making continued to reside within the system and that in the social marketplace, where the least expensive in terms of provision of services become the

most desirable 'customers', adults with learning difficulties are chosen rather than choosing.

The question addressed by this first section was the extent to which destinations post-school are influenced by social attitudes towards disabled people. How far does having a disability or learning difficulty determine your destination? The aspirations of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities for their adult lives are common with those of the general population, but evidence suggests that many of their aspirations remain unfulfilled. Furthermore, employment does not guarantee the achievement of a satisfactory lifestyle. Clearly, disability is an important factor in influencing career path and lifestyles in general, but from the research it would appear that disability alone does not account for what happens to young people after leaving school. However, as the CERI (1986) points out, one distinguishing and significant feature of the lives and experiences of young disabled people and their families is the contact they have with professionals from a range of different and sometimes confusing support services. Each of these services brings different perspectives and agendas to bear on the transition process and it is the nature of the decision-making process and the immediate influences of the young people, their families and professionals on that process that are considered in this next section.

### **The decision-makers**

Decisions about what to do when school ends are rarely made in isolation but are the result of a complex and interlocking set of influences and events. However, while the views of others are often considered and taken into account, there are wide variations in the extent to which these affect the final outcome. Kidd (1984) found that the more certain young people were about why they had chosen a particular career option, such as personal strengths, interests or values, the less likely they were to have relied on others to provide them with information and advice. Those who were uncertain were more likely to rely on informal rather than formal sources of advice. Significant others acted as sources of information about the self, occupational and educational opportunities, suitability for certain occupations, role models, means of obtaining work experience and as facilitators in the decision-making process.

In 1980, Halsey, Heath and Ridge noted that decisions, even at the school-leaving stage, are rarely made by individual young people acting alone but instead are influenced by family and other advisers. Killeen (1996) refers to this as the 'decision-making unit' (p.29). Thus families and friends as well as teachers, careers personnel and other professionals may all become part of the process as well as the young person themselves. The relationships mediate the information that passes between them. The nature of the influences on the information that each accumulates as well as on the information flow all need to be considered. The role of young people is considered first.

### *Young people as decision-makers*

The extent to which individual wishes, as opposed to external factors, determine post-school destinations is open to considerable debate although most commentators agree that individual aspirations do have some part to play. Clarke and Hirst (1989) in their follow-up study of 59 physically disabled young people found that while their aspirations were similar to those without disabilities, compared to the control group, very few had actually achieved their aspirations of marriage and a home of their own. How are aspirations formulated and why does it appear that young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are less likely to achieve them?

Three aspects are important in the formulation of post-school aspirations by young people – their self-concept and self-efficacy, their individual interests and values, and their levels of educational attainment.

The kind of goals young people formulate for their future lives will be governed by the beliefs individuals have about themselves, who they are and who they might become (Erikson, 1968) which in turn are influenced by social attitudes and expectations. CERI (1988) argued that disabled people are limited in this process by being socialised into their role as a 'handicapped' member of society. The impact on the family of having given birth to a disabled child and their feelings towards the child influences this early socialisation. They went on to say that for people with disabilities, secondary socialisation processes, i.e. structures external to the family, may adopt or replace these primary family functions by continuing the caring role

leading to the development of overly affectionate or inappropriate relationships between disabled people and others, thereby perpetuating the myth of the 'dependent child'. Young people with disabilities can therefore be inhibited from ever seeing themselves as adults, adopting adult roles and responsibilities and will not be encouraged to speculate about the adult they might become.

However, while non-disabled people may hold negative views about the capabilities of disabled people, Riddell *et al.* (1993) challenge the view held by social constructionists such as Goffman cited by CERI (1988) that disabled people automatically develop a negative view of themselves as a result. In support of this argument, they cite Jahoda, Markova and Cattermole (1988) who found that adults with severe learning difficulties saw themselves as the same as other people even though their parents and care workers viewed them as different.

Using a personal construct approach, Fox and Norwich (1992) carried out a similar study to that of Jahoda *et al.* (*op. cit.*) into the self-perceptions of 12 adults with severe learning difficulties attending a day centre. Again, the outcomes of this study also found them to have moderately positive self-perceptions which remained consistent. Ward, Thomson and Riddell (1994) reached similar conclusions when as part of a larger study into the destinations of young disabled school leavers in Scotland they conducted interviews with 11 young people who had left school two years previously. They found that all of them had a positive self-image.

However, feeling positive about one's self-image may not be as important in decision-making as developing a sense of control or agency. In the study referred to earlier, Hirst and Baldwin (1994) compared feelings of self-esteem among disabled young people to those of a control group. They concluded that young disabled people attending mainstream schools had higher self-esteem than those who had attended special schools but their self-esteem was lower than non-disabled pupils who had attended regular schools. However, while some young people scored higher than the general population on self-esteem, fewer felt a sense of personal control, which may be a more important factor in realising aspirations. According to Oyserman and Markus (1990) self-efficacy, that is confidence in one's own abilities, is just as

important as having positive self-esteem in negotiating a way through choices and options.

Second, the extent to which students are limited in developing preferences and interests by their own ability to process and respond to learning opportunities, as opposed to external factors, is open to debate. Most commentators now accept that difficulties in learning are interactive and that limited exposure to learning opportunities are just as likely to restrict students' abilities to develop interests and a knowledge of their strengths and capabilities (Krumboltz, 1979) as their own level of cognition. Young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities may be limited in the opportunities they are offered through external factors such as funding policies or physical access as well as the attitudes of parents and teachers, e.g. lack of access to work experience, college link programmes. This in turn will restrict their experiences and consequently their understanding about the nature of the choices that are open to them and their personal strengths and limitations.

The third influence is educational attainment. Many young people with learning difficulties and disabilities leave school with comparatively low levels of attainment. The extent to which entry to the labour market should depend on individual achievement is a contested issue and Tomlinson and Colquhoun (1995) maintain that dependence on individuals to raise their levels of competence does nothing to challenge the inequities that exist within the labour market.

So, the participation of the young person in the decision-making process and their influence on the outcomes may be limited by the extent to which they are afforded opportunities to develop their sense of control and personal agency as well as the kind of self-knowledge they need to be able to make informed choices. Finally, the increasing importance placed on educational qualifications can act as a further barrier to the realisation of their dreams and aspirations.

### *Families*

Families are a major influence on decisions taken at 16 and post-school options in general (Courtney, 1988; Taylor, 1992) although the influence may be direct or

indirect (Gaskell, 1992). Families bring to the process their own experiences and attitudes as well as networks of contacts from whom they gather information or find first jobs for their offspring. In 1970, Maizels noted that fewer young people found their first jobs through official means than through their own means or through parents, friends and relatives. However, in a much more recent study, Foskett and Hesketh (1997) found that young people are more instrumental in making choices at 16 than some earlier studies would suggest, but that these decisions are framed or circumscribed for them by their family circumstances and attitudes. Thus parents and children are both 'decision-makers' but the final decision is 'the product of internal processes within that partnership. The balance between the two partners will clearly vary from case to case and from issue to issue' (p.307). For example, families have been found to have the most significant influence on the post-school destinations of Muslim girls (Siann & Knox, 1992). So what is the nature and extent of the influence of the families of children with special educational needs? And are there additional or different factors at work?

There has been relatively little research into the experiences and needs of parents of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities during school - leaving, despite evidence to suggest that they find the period surrounding their child's transition from school particularly difficult. Beresford (1995) in a survey of 1,000 parents found that parents' second most pressing need was help with planning their child's future and there were consistently higher levels of unmet needs among the parents of older children. Gascoigne (1995), herself a parent of three disabled children, eloquently describes the feelings of many parents as their child approaches the school-leaving stage.

*'Parents are torn by conflicting wishes for and on behalf of their children as they approach the end of their formal school education and begin to consider the range of future options. On the one hand they want their child to become as independent as possible, and on the other hand they wish to extend their protection of them. This is true of all parents, whether or not their child has special needs. The feelings are exaggerated however where the pupil has special needs. The parents have probably fought many battles both within the home and with external agencies over the years to*

*maximise their child's independence. The approach of adulthood in their child may be a time when early hopes are finally dashed and/or where the hopes being realised cause an onset of panic' (p.138).*

The dilemmas Gascoigne describes can in part be explained by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theories of human development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) likened the influences on human development to a series of 'nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls' (p.3). The theory combines psychological, sociological and ecological perspectives into what he calls an ecosystemic theory defined by Sandow (1994) thus:

*'Each individual exists within a more or less concentric pattern of relationships and influences. These are described as the microsystem, comprising the activities, roles and relationships nearest to the individual, which itself is "nested" within a meso system, which has a more or less direct influence.'* (p.149)

Bronfenbrenner explains adolescent transitions as one of a number of experiences which occur throughout the life span, each of which he describes as 'ecological transitions'. These occur 'whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered as the result of a change in role, setting or both' (p.26). Gartner, Lipsky and Turnbull (1991) develop this idea further to take account of needs arising from the interrelationship between the life cycle of individuals and the life cycle of the family and their impact on familial roles and relationships, an issue of particular concern during adolescence. They suggest, however, that the issues at key stages are likely to be broadly similar and include 'adjustment and readjustment, the cycles of emotion, information gathering, and the parent-professional relationship' (p.72).

However, as Turnbull and Turnbull (1990) point out, while such transitions are often stressful, anxiety can be reduced through preparation or the execution of traditional rites of passage e.g. the birth of a child, retirement, death. Yet, as young people with disabilities approach the school-leaving stage, many will not have attained the traditional markers of this particular stage of their lives or have participated in the familiar or expected rituals, e.g. examinations, qualifications, leaving the family



home, boy or girl friends. This seeks to reinforce for parents what their child cannot do as well as exacerbating fears they may have for their child's future life so graphically described above by Gascoigne. So, to what extent are these understandable fears and anxieties likely to influence what happens at the point of leaving school?

Baron (1988) argues that emotions may be negative or positive depending on how certain we are about the potential outcome of a decision and whether the outcome itself is likely to be negative or positive. Parents may delay thinking about their disabled child's future both because it is uncertain and because they fear that it will be negative or less positive than it is currently. Alternatively, if parents are unhappy about their child's current schooling or situation, this may lead to an over-eagerness to change and to making an impulsive decision. In both these instances, the love the parents have for their child will have a specific and very particular impact on their decisions and thus a two-dimensional, positive/negative explanation is probably too simplistic. However there has been little research into this aspect of decision-making (Mellers, Schwartz, & Cooke, 1998) nor indeed into the effect that these emotions are likely to have on decisions about post-school destinations for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Like their children, however, what real choice do parents have? Both Reay (1996) and Wilkinson (2000) propose that it is often mothers who carry the main burden of decision-making with respect to their children. Along with Riddell, Brown and Duffield (1994), each of these commentators emphasises the central place of power in the decision-making process and both Riddell *et al.* and Reay argue that class plays a key role in helping parents to get what they want for their children. According to Reay, even where the working-class women in her study actively made choices about their children's education, they were still relatively powerless in influencing the course of events. For Wilkinson, the relative power of mothers of children with special educational needs in the decision-making processes was derived from three sources: their knowledge of the systems, their access to support networks, their identity and how they were perceived by others. These three elements combined to

determine the strength of their position in any negotiations that took place during the statementing process and their subsequent influence over the course of events.

The extent to which young people and their parents can exercise their influence over the decision-making processes resides in their personal agency and their relative power within the process. The extent to which they are enabled to participate or contribute to the process is dependent on factors which are often outside themselves. However, class and the cultural capital which that affords can play a significant role in determining the extent to which parental views are heard and it is to the influence of professionals and the interrelationships between young people, parents and professionals that I now turn.

#### *Professional/student/family relationships*

The relative authority of the different stakeholders within the process and the authority, either real or imagined, that they wield affects what and how decisions are made. Giddens (1979) argues that power resides in the interactions between groups or individuals and not within the groups themselves. Within special education there are numerous examples of the unequal power relationships that exist, for example, between parents and professionals (Harry, 1992; Sandow, 1994), between professional and professional (Weatherley, 1979), between parents and parents (Riddell *et al.*, 1994), and between disabled students and professionals (Corbett & Barton, 1992a).

One means of exercising power is through the communication or withholding of information. The sources of information available to young people and their families play an important role in helping to formulate their opinions and ideas. Derrington's (1997) study gave their main sources of information as the careers service, careers education in school and the 14+ annual review meeting. However, these data were derived from asking professionals and not from the parents or young people themselves. On the other hand, Foskett and Hesketh (1997) list a series of both formal and informal sources cited by pupils including parents, school friends, siblings and other family members. Likewise McNeill's (1990) research into 'career decision-making among young Bangladeshi school leavers revealed the influence of the values

of the local community in interpreting and networking information such as, for example, undervaluing bilingualism as an important skill. While she saw this as inevitable, she nevertheless concluded that these processes must be of concern to those responsible for the provision of careers guidance programmes.

As has been described, planning for the transition from school should, according to the Code of Practice, have commenced at the 14+ annual review (DfE, 1994), although under new guidance this is likely to be changed to Year 9. The Code reiterates the importance of fully involving young people in the process by invoking the principles of self or citizen advocacy. Schools are encouraged to involve students in the decision-making process, ensuring their views are made known, where necessary, through trusted others, e.g. family member, professional, independent advocate or adviser. The advocacy movement sprang from the rights movements of the sixties and seventies and the shift from movements *for* to movements *of* disabled people. Flynn and Ward (1991) describe the implications of the self-advocacy movement as 'a world in which different relationships between people with learning difficulties, their families and service personnel are implied; where people are given information, training and experience in making decisions and working with peers to make decisions; a world in which people's decisions are acted upon; and one in which their adult status is recognised' (p.130). Commentators are sceptical about the realisation of this vision in practice. Many professionals are unwilling to listen to disabled people or relinquish the power they are accorded through the current system (Brisenden, 1989; Corbett & Barton, *op. cit.*).

Likewise, many professionals underestimate both the influence and needs of parents during the transition phase, as well as failing to recognise the valuable contribution that they can make (CERI, 1986; Harry *op. cit.*). Weatherley (*op. cit.*) in his study of how professionals interpreted Public Law 94-142 observed the conduct of Individual Education Planning meetings and concluded that the higher the affluence of parents, the greater their influence over the outcomes of meetings. Professionals' views about the quality of parenting coloured their assessments of children's performance. The children of parents considered to be 'poor' received negative assessments while the children of those judged to be 'good' received positive assessments.

Scepticism about the real, as opposed to the theoretical, involvement of young people and their parents is supported by research into the conduct of transitional reviews (Derrington, *op. cit.*). Madden (1991) concluded that while the influence of parents appeared to be increasing in determining post-school placements of students with severe learning difficulties, the young people themselves still had limited involvement. Likewise Tisdall (1996) and Wood and Trickey (1996) concluded that such meetings are generally focused around the needs of professionals to meet their procedural obligations rather than a concern to involve young people and their parents in the process. The conduct of meetings and their length appear to be important factors in the degree of satisfaction with meetings felt by students and their parents. Tisdall found that where professionals had met beforehand and meetings were longer, parents and students felt more satisfied, while Miner and Bates (1997) found levels of satisfaction were more related to organisational factors than whether or not students and parents had been prepared for meetings.

How can this failure to involve young people and their parents be explained? Both sociological and psychological explanations contribute to our understanding. Corbett and Barton (*op. cit.*) locate the barriers to the full involvement of disabled people in decision-making within structural inequalities in the economy and society. Real choice does not exist because options are manipulated to accommodate changes in the labour market and funding levels. For example, access to training or further education may be increased or decreased according to government or local priorities either opening up or closing down opportunities.

This could lead to the conclusion that the ostensibly rational, participatory decision-making procedures described by the Code of Practice are therefore used to 'cloak' an essentially political process (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). Hudson (1989) builds on the work of Lipsky on public sector workers, whom Lipsky termed 'street level bureaucrats', and maintains that they are accorded considerable power and discretion in how they conduct their professional roles because they are required to make decisions about other people. Hudson notes, 'It is through street level bureaucrats that society organises the control, restriction and maintenance of relatively powerless

groups' (p.39). To manage the pressures on their working lives they are allowed to modify the demands that individuals can make, the concept of their jobs or the concept of their 'client'. In school-leaving terms this may mean, for example, that teachers can delay the start of discussions about school-leaving destinations, withhold information about what is available or suggest routes that conform to a particular stereotype, e.g., pupils with profound and complex learning difficulties generally go to day centres.

At an individual level, beliefs about an individual can help to form the implicit 'rules' that govern decision-making. Where a young person goes on leaving school may be influenced by the destinations of other leavers from the same school. For example, common patterns may be seen in progression routes from certain public schools to particular Oxbridge colleges or from special schools for the deaf to specialist colleges for the deaf. These decisions can be based on unspoken rules exercised by the professionals who are involved in providing information to students or parents about the options available to them, i.e. information is based on custom and practice. Mellers *et al.* (*op. cit.*) suggest that following rules helps to reduce the amount of effort involved in making decisions by having to consider and balance the trade-offs, i.e. if I choose 'a' then 'b' but, on the other hand, if I choose 'x' then 'y'.

How professionals frame and communicate options will have an effect on the choices that are made. Individuals are less likely to express a preference for a particular option if they hear negative reinforcement from a valued person or if they are not reinforced for doing activities associated with a particular option (Krumboltz, 1979). This may go some way to explaining differences in destination patterns among groups of school leavers from similar schools in similar areas.

Choices can also be influenced through tone of voice, through the choices that are presented, the order of choices and through the nature of the dialogue (Jenkinson, 1993; Mellers *et al.*, 1998). McKenna (1986) found that four types of choices were presented to adults with learning difficulties:- self-generated choices, e.g., 'What did you decide to do today?'; prompting about the need to make a decision, e.g., 'What would you like to do today?'; two or more options offered by staff member, e.g.,

‘Would you like to go for a walk or watch television?’; presentation with a fait accompli, e.g., ‘We’re going for a walk now.’ Jenkinson (1993) found that individuals are more likely to be influenced by others in complex decision-making situations where they experience stress or where choices are controlled, leading to a sense of helplessness, confirming Kidd’s (1984) findings about career choice and dependence on significant others.

Personal choice is also influenced by perceptions based on past and present experiences. A school may arrange for a student to visit a local college to find out more about a particular course and college life but, depending on the experiences of an older sibling, the student may or may not decide to choose to go to that college. The careers officer gives parents and their daughter some information about supported work placements but her father has observed in his own workplace how disabled people are treated and dismisses this as an option. These are not irrational decisions but based on the experiences of those involved.

So far I have considered how the relationship between students, parents and professionals can influence the options that are available and the choices that are made. However, inter-agency relationships may also influence decisions through the communication of information, their power and relative influence and the policies that govern them. CERI (1986, 1991) identified poor co-ordination and inconsistencies between different agencies as a major barrier for people with disabilities in the post-school years while McGinty and Fish (1992) argue that provision is generally led by the demands of services rather than the needs of individuals. Weatherley (1979) recorded a hierarchy of influence in his observations of Individual Education Planning meetings, with medical personnel taking precedence over teachers, for example. The extent to which these sorts of hierarchies exist in transition planning meetings and their effect on post-school destinations has not been researched.

Both the wider contextual influences as well as the more immediate influence of the decision-making unit have now been described. However, other influences in the young person’s immediate environment may also affect their post-school destinations.

## Other influences

### *The curriculum*

Teachers act as an important source of advice and information about what possibilities exist after school, but the quality and access to information and guidance that is offered differs markedly between schools (Taylor, 1992). The kinds of opportunities that may be provided include work experience, mini-enterprise schemes, link courses, business visits, residentials and community work. While Taylor did not include special schools in her study, she did find that differences existed not only between schools but within schools, and that boys and higher attaining pupils were more likely to participate in career-related activities. This supports the CERI's (1986) finding that lower-attaining pupils are less likely to experience careers education programmes in mainstream secondary schools than in special schools. Furthermore, the options that are presented by teachers may stem from judgements made about an individual's future potential based on present school performance rather than possible future placements.

Special schools are less likely to have on-site careers education and guidance specialists. In a recent survey of careers service staff, Bowers *et al.* (1998) found that careers officers believed that special schools' teachers had a better understanding of their role as careers advisers than their mainstream colleagues, a possible indication of the contribution made by careers service to the special schools' leavers programmes. A survey by the DfEE (1997) of careers services and young people with learning difficulties concluded that teachers and careers advisers were seen as the most important sources of advice and information although this rather simplistic conclusion does not take account of individual or family influences identified by other researchers (Kidd, *op. cit.*; Foskett and Hesketh, *op. cit.*) and described above.

Teachers are also important in supporting the development of what Krumboltz (1979) refers to as task approach skills or the skills 'to exercise meaningful choice' (CERI, 1986 p.29). Krumboltz argued that if children are to develop decision-making skills they must be encouraged to make their own plans and decisions as a result of gathering and analysing information.

While there have been a number of publications about what should be provided as part of the transition curriculum (McGinty & Fish, 1992; Griffiths, 1994), as Bradley *et al.* (1994) have pointed out, UK writing on transition programmes has generally reiterated principles rather than provided an exploration of the effectiveness of school-based programmes. In contrast, there has been a considerable amount written in the United States on the efficacy of various interventions designed to support individuals and their families. This has been triggered partly by the implementation of the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 and Goals 2000: Educate America Act also enacted in 1994 (Kohler & Rusch, 1995).

Transition programmes can be broadly divided into three types: specially designed curriculum (Wehman, Moon, Everson, Wood & Barcus, 1988; Wehman, 1992; Brinckerhoff, 1996); individually focussed planning activities (Clark, 1996); and inter-agency planning and collaboration (Blalock, 1996; Dowdy, 1996); or a combination of all three (Collett-Klingenberg, 1998). Empirical research has demonstrated that chances of finding and keeping work have been increased as a result of a number of these programmes (Siegel, Robert, Waxman & Gaylord-Ross, 1992; Miner & Bates, 1997).

The emphasis in much of the US literature on self-determination contrasts with that of the UK which adopts a largely structuralist approach. For example, an American author Brinckerhoff (*op. cit.*) concludes:

*'...the key ingredient to success in higher education (for learning disabled students) and, ultimately, in the world of work, lies within the students themselves. They are the ones who need to master the critical study skills, learning strategies, and daily living and vocational skills that will enable them to journey through life with dignity and independence.'* (p.132)

This contrasts with the position of some UK commentators such as Corbett and Barton (1992a; 1992b), Tomlinson and Colquhoun (1995), and Macrea, Maguire and Ball (1997), all of whom point to inequities in social and economic structures, leading



to questions about the worth of careers education and guidance programmes. Watts (1981, p.3) commenting on these cultural differences in approach concluded, 'The failure of the American social-structural evidence to have much influence on career development theory seems to be due basically to cultural and historical factors.' On the other hand, Super (1981) felt that UK commentators tended to over-emphasise this perspective although recently this emphasis has been redressed, notably by Law (1996).

### *Local opportunities*

The effects of school type on educational outcomes and destinations has long been the subject of research. However, the effects of special schooling on destination as opposed to mainstream placement have been less systematically investigated. Hirst and Baldwin (1994) concluded that young people with special educational needs leaving mainstream schools displayed higher levels of self-efficacy than those who had attended special schools. By contrast, Hornby and Kidd (2001) found that the transfer ten years earlier from special to mainstream school of the young adults in their study seemed to make little difference to them getting a job, with 17 out of 24 unemployed.

Studies comparing youth unemployment in different parts of the country demonstrate quite clearly the effects of local economic conditions on youth unemployment (Courtney, 1988; Courtney, 1989; Sime, 1991; Banks *et al.* 1992; Park, 1994; Wilkinson, 1995). For example, Wilkinson found that in Sunderland youth unemployment was running at one in three as compared to one in four nationally. In areas of high unemployment, access to training may then be limited for people with disabilities or learning difficulties, because they come lower in the pecking order. Wilkinson (*ibid*) suggests that:

*'... there will always be some severely disabled and disadvantaged young people who are unemployable, but on the next rung of the ladder are those who are employable and who have the basic skills needed to do routine but productive work. However, very often these routine non-skilled jobs are taken up by more able young people.'*  
(p.92)

While his assertion that some young people will always be unemployable could be disputed, what Wilkinson's study also highlights is the knock-on effect of changes in local economies on young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

As an alternative to employment, many of those who in the past would have gone out to work when they left school now go on to education and employment schemes, but the quality of many such schemes has been found to be poor, failing to match the needs of young people. May and Hughes (1985) found that, apart from a small minority of young people who had remained in employment since leaving school at 16, for the vast majority this period was characterised by increasingly longer periods of unemployment interspersed with time spent on inappropriate government-sponsored training schemes. Recent Chief Inspector's reports from the FEFC (1997, 1998; 1999) have consistently drawn attention to the poor quality of much further education provision with students being placed on inappropriate courses, so that, despite Walker's conclusion in 1982 that what many young people lacked was access to continuing education and training, the quality of many such schemes has subsequently been found to be disappointing and irrelevant, containing rather than challenging learners.

The implementation of the Code of Practice seems to have done little to redress some of these inequities and gaps in local provision. The Code's emphasis on an individualistic approach to planning succeeded, at least at a policy level, in moving planning away from a service-led to a needs-led perspective. But this change of direction did not address many of the inherent weaknesses and contradictions in the current systems and services, some of which have been exacerbated through the implementation of other conflicting social policies. For example, the Code stressed the importance and value of link courses between schools and colleges in helping young people to understand more about their options after school. Yet there has been a marked decline in the availability of such programmes (Derrington, *op. cit.*) as a result of changes in funding arrangements and increased competition between schools, colleges and training providers driven by government commitment to the creation of a social marketplace.

Inter-agency strategic planning, which might have addressed some of the gaps in local provision, has been hampered by policies that have sought to reduce the power and influence of local authorities. Maychell and Bradley (1991) concluded that local inter-agency planning was over-dependent on committed individuals and lacked any strategic commitment. More recently the introduction of the Connexions Service with its avowed intention to 'provide coherent support to young people over time and across current service boundaries' (DfEE, 2000, p.31) combined with its links to the new Learning and Skills Councils, offers the potential to link individual and strategic levels of planning. However, this brokering role, to be carried out by Personal Advisers assigned to each targeted young person, is likely to do little to alter some of the fundamental legislative and funding barriers that prevent health, social services and education from working more effectively together.

### *Peers*

Very little attention is given in the literature to the influence of peers on post-school choices. Roberts (1971) concluded that peers had very little influence compared to family and other significant adults while, more than a quarter of a century later, Foskett and Hesketh (1997) concluded that friendship networks had a fairly strong general influence but they were rarely the deciding factor in what young people chose to do. However, the influence of peers may well be shown to be stronger where young people lack any clear sense of direction combined with feelings of low self-efficacy. Certainly Macrea *et al.* (1997), in their study of school leavers in North London, identified a number of different groups of young people some of whom were heavily influenced by their friends. These they termed 'hangers-on' – young people who would have liked to have got a job but who were instead reluctantly attending NVQ or GNVQ courses.

### *Media*

Although relatively under-researched as a potential influence on career choice, some have argued that the media exercises an indirect influence through providing information about possibilities, the nature and length of training as well as the nature of work. For example, Hawthorn (1997) suggests that television and radio extend

ideas once notions have already been planted, possibly by a significant other such as parents or teachers, rather than directly influencing choice. Programmes also provide a vehicle for discussing and sharing ideas with others, although images portrayed in fiction can also sustain stereotypes reinforcing racist, gendered or ageist perspectives on employment options. Equally, the media can act positively to challenge stereotypes through providing role models, particularly where individuals identify with the content of the story.

So far I have described how the decision-makers, their relationships and the information that flows between each of them are governed by a range of factors which may or may not influence what the young person does when they leave school. We turn now to the decision task itself. How are decisions made?

### **Putting it all together – the decision task**

Decision-making processes have been the subject of considerable study across a range of contexts and disciplines throughout the twentieth century. While the context often determines the explanatory framework that is adopted, e.g. economists are more likely to use game theory or managers to use organisational theory, there is increasing interest in moving between paradigms and schools of thought in seeking to understand particular issues. The danger, of course, in adopting a ‘pick and mix’ approach is that the essential elements and robustness of the original theoretical model are lost as only those aspects that seem to offer an explanation or causation of a particular phenomenon are selected.

Norwich eloquently sums up many of the dilemmas of those researching in the field of education:

*‘... education has a need for theory which includes evaluative, conceptual and empirical elements. It is not exclusively for knowledge from one contributory discipline, nor for practical or professional knowledge derived only from practitioners or social scientists. Psychology’s contribution to education theory and practice, though critical, is therefore one of many, with the “many” including*

*understanding and knowledge from allied disciplines, educational and curriculum theories, educational researchers and practitioners. ' (2000, p.67)*

Killeen (1996) writing about career learning makes the same point. Those working in careers guidance, for example, have traditionally taken a 'magpie' approach. Early career learning theory, looking in particular at how people make decisions about careers, was strongly influenced by psychology drawing on both developmental and behavioural psychology as well as economic or organisational theories to explain and understand career choice. Later, as the nature of working lives began to change however, a concern grew to see career as personal history or narrative, i.e. to consider career learning over time as well as in the context of changing social contexts at both personal and societal levels. Hence sociological (most particularly structuration theory) and ecosystemic theories began to influence thinking. The tension between rational choice or agency and structural theories of decision-making led to a considerable body of literature which sought to combine these ideas. Killeen concludes:

*'Theories are useful if they help us to interpret careers, seeing them in ways which, without the theory, would remain invisible to us... The price we pay for this is, of course, that theories may blind us to what lies beyond their scope. This is why it is important for guidance practitioners to be aware of theory, not merely a theory. (1996, p.41)*

As discussed earlier, definitions of transition ( McGinty & Fish, 1992) acknowledge both the legislative and bureaucratic nature of the school-leaving phase as well as the psycho-social processes involved and to that end, in the following review, I have drawn together ideas from a range of disciplines: sociological, psychological and organisational theories. These are then related to what is known about career learning and decision-making among young people with special educational needs as a context for the subsequent study.

Decisions about what to do after school involve making plans, the outcomes of which are uncertain. Plans are made over a period of time and will probably involve making

a number of smaller decisions which may or may not lead towards the desired goal, e.g. I want to become a barrister but I will need to decide which A levels will best improve my chances of being able to read law at university; I want to become a tour guide but I need to decide whether to do an NVQ or a GNVQ to increase my chances of getting a job. Braybrooke and Lindblom (1970, p.71) refer to this as 'incremental' decision-making or the 'science of muddling through'. Although they were writing about political decision-making, a number of their ideas are relevant to decision-making during transition particularly as experienced by parents and young people. They argue that in complex situations, where people have low levels of understanding and limited knowledge about their options, they are more likely to make small, disjointed decisions.

Broadly speaking, theories of decision-making fall into two schools of thought: *normative* and *descriptive* (Bell, Raiffa & Tversky, 1988). Governmental careers guidance and transition planning policies have been strongly influenced by normative or rational theories. Baron (1988) describes *normative* theory as 'the theory of how we should choose among possible actions under ideal conditions. The best decision ... is the one that best helps us to achieve our goals' (p. 48). Individuals weigh up the pros and cons of various courses of action using the information available to them. For example, in advising the school sector about making applications to further education, the Further Education Funding Council's Circular 93/05 states that assessments should be based on:

*'the availability to young people and their advocates of a full range of information from the LEA about post-16 education and training choices, to inform placement decisions as indicated in the parents charter'. (p.14)*

Yet there is now considerable research evidence to show that rational explanations are inadequate. Instead *descriptive* approaches describing how people make decisions rather than how they should behave are more helpful (Mellers *et al.*, 1998). Descriptive models emphasise the messiness of the process and the potential for stress and anxiety. Decision-making is influenced as much by affective and personality factors and past experiences as by logic. Furthermore, feelings of control and



motivation are influenced by the extent to which an individual feels that a genuine choice has been presented to them.

How do these theories help us understand more about decision-making at the school-leaving stage and people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities? Jenkinson (1993) concludes that by understanding more about the nature of general decision-making, with all its contingent complexity, more appropriate support can be provided both through how options are presented and by reducing the negative impact of external variables such as legal or economic constraints.

Models for understanding more about how career decisions are made have drawn on both rational and descriptive schools of thought. Early theoreticians saw career learning as a primarily rational process. One of the earliest ideas was the trait and factor theory in which young people identified their strengths and weaknesses and then matched these to opportunities in the labour market, choosing a job based on wage levels and opportunities for advancement. Developmentalists such as Super (1957) argued that as individuals progress through their lives (i.e. their life span) they pass through three stages of career development: preparation, action and rest – broadly equating to childhood, adulthood and old age. Adolescence was regarded as a period of exploration during which individuals developed their unique identity, trying out possible career options and endeavouring to achieve the best match between their self-concept and the person they want to become.

Social learning theorists such as Gottfredson (1981) emphasised the interactive nature of career learning and decision-making. She argued that learning experiences and the influence of others shape the 'zone of acceptable alternatives' (p.548). Career aspirations are formed through matching the concept of self to desirable occupations. Beliefs about occupations are formulated or circumscribed by a range of factors, the most fundamental being that of gender. Aspirations change over time as individuals understand more about themselves and their unique abilities and interests as well as the effort required in pursuing a particular career path, acceptability of the job to their social class, and the values they attach to their gender-related rôles, i.e. man as provider, woman as home-maker.

Gottfredson's theory raises some interesting questions in relation to students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Like most commentators, she does not consider disability as a factor in defining aspirations. Is gender more important than either disability or learning difficulties in defining aspirations (as opposed to realising aspirations)? How helpful is this in understanding the complaints from professionals that young people with special educational needs are often unrealistic in their aspirations? Is it partly that they have not been provided with the opportunities to explore and refine possibilities?

Certainly Krumboltz's work (1979) would suggest that learning experiences and how an individual responds to and uses those experiences are an essential part of the career learning process. Like Gottfredson, Krumboltz regards career learning as an interactive process between the individual and their environment and that this influences how they analyse and interpret information. This suggests that cognition plays an important part in choosing between options. Krumboltz argues for a positive programme of intervention in which children and young people are encouraged to plan and make decisions; are rewarded rather than punished for doing activities associated with a particular option; are exposed to experiences of different options and receive objective advice from valued individuals. However, Krumboltz too emphasises the shifting and unpredictable nature of the process as individuals explore and make judgements about their choices.

Thus, while some have argued that career decision-making is a rational process, others see it as messy and exploratory. Harren (1979) combined a number of these theories and identified four types of decision-making: rational, i.e. weighing up the pros and cons of various options; intuitive, i.e. jumping to conclusions based on instinct or feelings; dependent, i.e. deferring to the opinions of others; and intuitive/dependent. However, each of these approaches emphasises the importance of agency – that is the individual and their immediate environment as being the key factors in determining destinations. Opportunity structure theorists on the other hand see the main determinants of post-school destinations as barriers residing within



society and in educational and socio-economic opportunities (e.g. Roberts, 1971; Willis, 1977; Furlong, 1992).

So far, much of the discussion has focused on the *formulation* of aspirations rather than the *realisation* of aspirations. Career learning models describe how young people decide what they want to do, suggesting a conscious act and a sense of agency and control. In some instances, young people's dreams and aspirations are largely realised, others compromise and change directions many times, while others apparently become victims of circumstance drifting on the tide of events and the whims of others. Alheit's (1994) study of unemployed German youth shows how many experience a gradual loss of control as the scale and number of problems accumulate, forcing them into a reactive rather than proactive response and a subsequent loss of agency.

Building on Erikson's (1968) ideas, Oyserman and Markus (1990) explored the concept of 'possible selves' which describes what individuals 'could become, would like to become or are afraid of becoming' (p.112). Who we want to become or want to avoid becoming can provide the motivation for making choices and decisions and a strategy for avoiding the feared self, e.g. 'I want to go to university to get a degree so I need to work hard to get good grades to avoid having to take up a dead-end job.' Their research into the aspirations of young offenders found that they lacked the strategies for avoiding their feared possible self, e.g. homelessness, prison, and that their feared self was not balanced by a positive possible self. They suggest that some young people do not develop either positive or negative possible selves and therefore look for other ways in which to define themselves, such as through the approbation of their peer group. In relation to students with special educational needs, they may not be encouraged to speculate about their positive or negative possible selves because of the fears of parents and teachers about what the future holds.

None of these theories go far enough, however, in explaining either the complexity of the decision-making process or its relevance to people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. More recently, Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) have developed the concept of *careership* describing the transition from school as only one

point in an individual's life course and influenced by three interlocking dimensions: the passage of time, pragmatic job choices, and the unequal balance of power between young people and external factors. This approach and its implications for understanding how decisions are made at the school-leaving stage for students with special educational needs are now examined in more detail.

Hodkinson *et al.* (*ibid*) adopt the term 'careership' rather than *career path* or *career trajectory* as an attempt to communicate the often unpredictable nature of individual careers. By adopting a life course perspective, transition from school is seen as only one point in an individual's life and the decisions that are made are part of a long-term incremental process rather than a final and isolated event which then sets an individual's life course. This is a helpful idea when thinking about the post-school destinations of young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties because it helps to broaden our understanding about the type of decisions that are made at this point. What type of decisions are made and is it possible to categorise them?

Our life course is characterised by periods of routine and changes of direction or turning points. During routine periods choices can be confirmed, e.g. 'I'm pleased I decided to stay on at school'; challenged, e.g. 'I wish I had decided to go out to work and earn some money'; or accommodated, e.g. 'I didn't like the course at first but now it's not so bad.' Periods of routine are subject to events which can transform or alter the direction in which an individual is heading. According to Hodkinson *et al.*, there are three types: structural, including statutory or administrative events, such as leaving school; external events, which are unexpected and are sometimes traumatic; and self-initiated events, such as giving up a job or getting married. These turning points can confirm or contradict previously held opinions or they can present new alternative ideas which cause individuals to extend or change their viewpoints. Hodkinson describes these events as transforming ideas and these transformations could presumably apply as much to parents or families as to the young person themselves.

Building on theories of social learning and, in particular, Gottfredson's 'zone of possibilities', Hodkinson *et al.* suggest that young people build 'horizons for action'

(p.149) which either constrain or enable choice. These may be externally determined, i.e. by local opportunities, or internally determined, i.e. by what individuals consider to be suitable for themselves. The self develops through the incremental choices that are made about lifestyles, although the extent to which lifestyle is individually versus culturally or socially determined is a matter for debate. Choices may be rational, in that it is possible to give reasons for choices, but responses are also innate and intuitive embedded in cultural and social backgrounds. Information about the options that are available is both subjective and objective and is gathered from the immediate as well as the wider environment.

In addition, decision-making takes place within a framework of national and local policies and the relative balance of power held by the various stakeholders, e.g. the young person, parents, employers, training providers etc. Each of the stakeholders possess differential levels and types of resources. For example, young people have qualifications and skills, parents and families sometimes have networks of contacts, professionals possess information and know-how for gaining access to funding, while national and local bodies hold funding. If funding or information is withheld then possession of relevant qualifications by individuals may make little difference.

The relationship which Hodkinson *et al.* explore, between individual and external factors, is a constant theme in most writing on career learning. As pointed out earlier, while American thinking tended to be influenced by psychological approaches emphasising the actions of the individual, UK thinking has been dominated by structuralists who proposed that the determinants of post-school destinations and career paths are socially determined by class, gender, ethnicity (Roberts, 1971; Willis, 1977). Reflecting on this dichotomy, Watts (2001) suggests that Americans have tended to under-estimate the significance of structural factors while the British exaggerated them. In 1981 Law argued that what was needed was a model of career decision-making that drew on both psychological and sociological theories in order to better understand the complex relationship between these internal and external forces. Law suggested that instead of focusing on either individually focused explanations or societal explanations, career learning theorists needed to look more closely at the nature of the interactions between the individual and their communities, i.e. parents,

friends, extended families, neighbours, ethnic communities, each of whom acted as important sources of information and support as well as setting expectations and acting as role models.

Meanwhile in the States, Super (1981) challenged his own developmental theories of career learning, which were strongly psychological in approach, by examining the career paths of adults. He formulated a 'life-space, life span' approach arguing that adults adapt their careers to circumstances, stressing the interactive nature of the relationship between the individual and their environment. Both Young (1983) Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenberg (1986) and Vondracek (1990), in developing their ideas about career learning, argued that career development results from the interaction between an individual's characteristics and social, cultural and physical factors in the environment.

Like the earlier discussion on work with families, many of these ideas on career learning stemmed from the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecosystemic approach. The importance of ecological systems theory to understanding transitions was again recently reiterated by Cooper and Denner who argued that 'transitions across contexts are an increasing area of study in ecological systems theory' (1998, p.567). Bronfenbrenner, working in the United States and building on the earlier work of Kurt Lewin, proposed a model of human behaviour and development that combined both psychological and sociological theories. Bronfenbrenner refers to the relationships between the individual and their immediate environment as 'micro-systems', e.g. child alone, child and parent, child and siblings, child and teacher. Individual development is shaped not only through these direct encounters but through relationships between social settings referred to as 'meso-systems', e.g. between family and school, school and social services, school and employment. Furthermore he argues that individuals may be profoundly influenced by events occurring in settings where they are not present 'exo-systems'. Finally he argues that each of these three systems are a prototype of the 'macro-system' so that between societies there are very profound differences. Furthermore he states, 'these consistent patterns of organisation and behaviour find support in the values generally held by members of the given culture or subculture' (p.258). This clearly has implications for

ethnic minority families and communities living in what can be seen as an alien culture with different sets of values and beliefs or indeed young people born in the United Kingdom of ethnic minority parents attempting to straddle two cultures.

As described earlier, Bronfenbrenner's ideas have been applied to developing ideas about the best means of supporting the families of children and young people with special educational needs, particularly during periods of transition and change. Turnbull and Turnbull (1990), Gartner *et al.* (1991), Harry (1992), Sandow (1994), Pell and Cohen (1995), Beckman (1996), and Christenson and Sheridan (2001) all draw heavily on ecosystemic approaches in their writing, suggesting that only by understanding more about the natural dynamic of the family and seeing the family as an environment within an environment can support services work effectively with pupils and students with special educational needs. Pell and Cohen's work, for example, provides a framework for rethinking the organisation of support services so that the multiple roles which parents play within the many micro-systems they inhabit are recognised, e.g. client, customer, advocate, provider. They argue that the extent to which parents can adopt these roles is dependent on a range of influences including the family's own capacity; the stage in the life cycle of the family; their economic resources; the willingness of the services to allow them to adopt these roles. Their arguments rest on a belief that the balance of power must be shifted away from the formal services by reinforcing and supporting the natural capacity of families to act positively on behalf of their children. This is partly achieved by recognising or building up the natural support networks of families which exist in communities, the extended family, friends, community groups and so forth. They conclude, 'An ecological systems approach is informed by an understanding of the inherent symbiosis between formal and informal systems that have an impact on the child' (1995, p.387).

There are striking parallels between the application of Bronfenbrenner's ideas to career learning and ways of working with families of children with special educational needs. Both emphasise the importance of understanding the dynamic of human behaviour within the individual's natural environment particularly at points of change or 'ecological transitions'. Both draw on the importance of the individual's

capacity to adapt to or adopt different roles within different and changing contexts and the responses of others in relation to the person in that role. Both emphasise the under-recognised significance of community interactions at the micro-, meso- and exo- levels that take place in local neighbourhoods, in family groups, schools, clubs, pubs, churches, shops, the workplace etc. Finally, both use these ideas to critique the ways in which services currently interact with their clients.

There have been few attempts to combine these ideas in understanding more about the transition from school of young people with special educational needs and how best to support them and their families. Like the studies of Young (*op. cit.*) and Vondracek *et al.* (*op. cit.*) discussed above, Szymanski (1994) adopts an individual life-span model and suggests that the current emphasis in many transition programmes for pupils with special educational needs is too narrowly focussed on the school to post-school transition phase. Drawing on the later work of Super (1981) on life span and the social learning theory of Krumboltz (1979), both influenced by the ecosystemic theorists, Szymanski proposes a two-dimensional model of transition. She sees the school-leaving stage as a single point in an incremental process of lifelong development and combines this with a life-space approach which acknowledges the importance of the interaction between the young person and their learning environment which includes their family, culture and community. Families, she argues, need to become central to planning and not an add-on. Support during transition must reflect the values, beliefs, role models of the young person's culture. Professionals will need to relinquish control of the decision-making processes if they are to offer pertinent support.

## **Conclusions**

The central question I set out to explore in this study was:

- What are the influences on the decisions that are made about the post-school destinations of young people with special educational needs?

My reading has led me to refine this question and in drawing this section to a close a number of themes and issues have emerged from the literature that raise new

questions about the nature of the decision-making process for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities during their final school years and the influences upon it. Four themes and related questions are worthy of further exploration.

*The nature of the influences and their interaction with the young person's disability or learning difficulty*

One of the main reasons for this study was to explore the extent to which young people, as opposed to other external factors, influenced their destinations at the school-leaving stage. Based on my observations of a group of school leavers I speculated that their schools and the attitudes of their teachers would have a substantial influence and that the guidance they received about their options was by no means objective. While the range of influences is clearly much wider and more complex, I further speculated that the nature of these influences are not substantially different from those that affect all other young people. The extent to which the young person's disability predetermines post-school destinations has been challenged through a number of studies. However, it is clear that it does have an influence. The question is therefore:

- How does a young person's disability and/or learning difficulty interact with other influences in the decision-making process?

*The second issue is that of agency*

The essential tension between individual determinism or agency and the influence of external structural factors has emerged as a central issue in the literature. To believe that individuals are entirely free agents in determining their own destinies is naïve, but to accept that they have no control over their lives is depressing. Is there a middle way? It is clear that some young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities possess characteristics and strategies that provide them with some advantages at the school-leaving stage. This leads to the question:

- Are there particular individual personal characteristics and strategies which provide some young people with advantage even if they have a disability and/or learning difficulty?

*Thirdly, the impact of relationships*

The nature of the relationship between parents and their child will necessarily be different from that of the professionals with the young person. Equally the relationship between parents and professional will differ. These relationships will be shaped by their perceptions of their own and each others' role and status as well as their individual beliefs and experiences. Furthermore, different people will exercise different degrees of power and influence over each other as well as on the decision-making processes.

- What are the influences on these relationships in the decision-making process and what impact does disability and/or learning difficulty have in the formation of these relationships?
- Why are some people 'heard' in the decision-making process and some not?

*Finally, the impact of time on the decision-making process*

The CERI report of 1986 divides the period of transition into three interconnected parts beginning with the final years of schooling, moving on to what they term 'transitional arrangements' such as vocational guidance and training and thence to adult and working life. But it is worth remembering that, according to Giddens (1984), 'Discipline can proceed only via the manipulation of time and of space' (p.145), meaning that the administrative and social expectations that are associated with different points of an individual's life are socially constructed. Without a set time for leaving school some people could remain there indefinitely or never attend in the first place. Structures and systems order time but changes in structures and systems can change our perceptions of time, as can personal events. We have already observed the increasingly extended nature of the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. Alheit's (*op. cit.*) study of unemployed youth demonstrated how loss of the structures imposed by work led to young men and women recreating their own ways of manipulating time.

- How does the passage of time enable or constrain the decision-making processes?



**Thus the questions which this thesis seeks to answer are:**

- What are the influences on the decisions that are made about the post-school destinations of young people with special educational needs?
- How does a young person's disability and/or learning difficulty interact with other influences in the decision-making process?
- Are there particular individual characteristics and strategies which provide some young people with advantage in the decision-making process even if they have a disability and/or learning difficulty?
- What are the influences on the relationships in the decision-making process and what impact does disability and/or learning difficulty have on the formation of these relationships?
- Why are some people 'heard' in the decision-making process and some people not?
- How does the passage of time enable or constrain the decision-making process?

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### **The research questions**

The central purpose of this study was to explore how decisions are made about the post-school destinations of school leavers with special educational needs and the influences on that process. The intention therefore was not just to examine the outcomes of the process but how the process was experienced by young people and their families and the questions that arise from this main purpose. The research questions can be grouped around three main themes:

- disability and agency;
- relationships within the decision-making process;
- time.

#### *Disability and agency*

The first set of questions concern the nature of the individual and what they bring to the decision-making process.

- How does a young person's disability or learning difficulty interact with other influences in the decision-making process?
- Are there particular individual personal characteristics and strategies which provide some young people with advantage even if they have a disability and/or learning difficulty?

What were the implications of this first set of questions for the design of the study? It is self-evident that the young people who were to be the focus of the study should possess some form of disability or learning difficulty and that the full range and complexity of special educational needs should be represented within the target group. Second, a decision was taken to vary the socio-economic backgrounds as well as gender and

ethnicity of the young people, not to explore the differences per se but to ensure representation. Furthermore, research has also shown that an individual's schooling, including mainstream or special school placement, as well as local opportunities, play a significant part in determining the next step in an individual's career path (Ward *et al.*, 1991). Consequently participants needed to be drawn from different localities as well as various types of school.

### *Relationships*

The second set of questions related to the nature of the relationships between the main players and how these impact on the decision-making process. The questions were:

- What are the influences on these relationships in the decision-making process and what influence does disability have on the formation of these relationships?
- Why are some people 'heard' in the process and some people not?

It is clear from the literature that those having immediate influence on the process are likely to be the young person's family and key professionals, most probably their teachers. Rather than adopting the idealistic position, which sees the young person as the main decision-maker, I recognised that in reality it is the dynamic between these key players that determines any outcome. They become what Killeen (1996) describes as 'the decision-making unit', and thus the design of the study needed to enable the views of each decision-maker to be gathered. In addition, Giddens (1984) argues that power and influence reside in the interactions between individuals and not within the individuals per se. Thus, in addition to individual views and perspectives, data on interpersonal relationships and interactions within the 'decision-making unit' itself were also required.

### *Time*

The final question relates to time: how it is constructed and the constraining as well as enabling influence of the passage of time on the decision-making process.

- How does the passage of time enable or constrain the decision-making processes?

My concern with the effects of time on the decision-making process springs from the very nature of the task itself. By definition, the transition from child to adulthood is necessarily timebound and covers a distinctive developmental stage in a young person's life. While I have argued that this period of transition can be personally as well as socially, culturally and legally determined, the passage of time is inevitably part and parcel of the process of growing up and it is in this context that decisions have to be made. Therefore, I needed to be able to track the process over time in order to tell the story of what happened but criteria were required for deciding when to begin and end the study. Given limited resources and my own timetable, I chose to limit this investigation to the school-leaving period. Since all young people are bound by the externally imposed event of leaving school, it seemed sensible to use this as the endpoint of the study. In addition, for young people with statements of special educational needs the other externally imposed event, the 14+ annual review, signalled the official start of the decision-making process. Although, in practice, these procedures do not occur at the same age for all young people, the scope of this enquiry also endeavoured to embrace this event.

### **Research approach**

Integral to the design of this project was the importance of trying to understand the experiences of the transition process of the young people and their parents or carers. This located the design of the project within the interpretative paradigm, in so far as I believed that different people construed the process differently depending on their role within the process. I was eager to discover more about how the process felt for young people with special educational needs and their families so that through these insights professionals might learn how best to support them. Yet, as Reissman (1993) points out, 'Investigators do not have direct access to another's experience' (p.8). She suggests that from the lived experience there are many layers of sifting, shaping and reinterpreting from the telling of the story or account to a third party, their analysis and interpretation and then their subsequent re-presentation to another. The accounts are therefore necessarily limited and become something other in the telling and a creation of the researcher.

This process of recreation lends power to the critics of the interpretative paradigm who emanate from both positivists, or proponents of scientific methods, and the critical theorists or emancipatory school of thought. The former criticise interpretivists for their tendency to generalise without regard for issues of validity and reliability. Schofield (2000) notes that much qualitative literature has tended to neglect the whole issue of generalisability, arguing that the issue is irrelevant and unachievable. Yet, for many researchers, generalisability to a wider population is one of the main aims of scientific endeavour (Smith, 1975).

Critical theorists, on the other hand, are concerned to give voice to under-represented groups in order to bring about social change. The underlying paradigm for much of this debate rests on a model of participatory and emancipatory research. These two terms are often used interchangeably but, according to Stalker (1998), both terms represent a commitment to challenging the researcher's role as 'expert'. Instead, the participants in research are seen as equal partners in the process with a right to be consulted and involved in the issues that affect their lives so that the quality of the research is enhanced through this active participation.

There has been considerable concern expressed by some disabled researchers that the voice of people with disabilities, like that of others from disadvantaged groups, is mediated through those who have no notion of the lived experience of disabled people (Barnes, 1992; Oliver, 1993) and that research has resulted in few significant changes to the quality of many people's lives. Clough and Barton (1995) caution potential researchers to examine their own underlying assumptions and values before embarking on a piece of research. Keeping a reflexive log helped in this process, but it remained an important activity throughout the conduct of the study by enabling me to challenge my own feelings and attitudes throughout the process of data collection.

### *Involving young people in research*

The importance of gaining young peoples' perspectives has been given impetus by the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and within the UK, through the 1989 Children Act and more recently the Code of Practice (1994; 2001). From within the disability research community, as discussed above, the concern to conduct research *with* rather than *on* disabled people has added to the increased need to develop strategies and approaches which ensure the voice of children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is heard. Increasingly in schools and colleges the voice of the learner is perceived as having an integral part to play in improving practice (Fielding, 1999; Jelly, Fuller & Byers 2000). However, the challenge for researchers and practitioners is how best to approach the task, particularly where learners rely on non-orthodox means of communication and/or have a cognitive impairment since communication is at the heart of the research endeavour. While Allan describes how the children and young people with special educational needs in her study spoke with 'an ease and a fluency' (1999, p. 2), others are more cautious. Stalker (*op. cit.*), reflecting on the difficulties of involving people with profound impairments as respondents, raises a number of dilemmas. In seeking their views, how can researchers know whether they understand the questions or whether they want to be part of the project? This is particularly difficult where abstract concepts are involved such as the future or choice. Within the constraints of academic expectations on the one hand and conceptual and communication limitations on the other, Stalker maintains that ways of negotiating their involvement and the principle of accountability must be upheld.

There has been some work carried out with adults with learning difficulties (Mithaug & Mar, 1980; Parsons and Reid, 1990a; 1990b; March, 1992; Cheston, 1994; Reiff *et al.*, 1995; Goodley, 1996; Sample, 1996). These studies employed a series of different techniques to elicit the views of people with learning difficulties on a range of topics. As well as standard interview techniques the methods used included augmentative strategies such as presenting real tasks, food or drink items or photographs as well as discourse analysis in which the stories people told about their lives were analysed. Lewis (1995) in

her study of children and young people's views of disability used drawings, audio and video recordings of children working together and interviews either formal or informal carried out in the context of their daily activities.

Researchers and practitioners together (McIntosh & Whittaker, 2000) have also been exploring ways in which self-advocacy groups can work with people with profound and complex learning difficulties to express their preferences through the use of Circles of Friends. A trained facilitator works with the young person and their families and friends over time and in a setting of their choice to develop a personal futures plan (Wertheimer, 1995). The implications of this approach for research suggests that only by working with a group of people who know the young person very well and are attuned to their means of communication can the perspectives of young people with profound and complex learning difficulties be discerned. Even so, Detheridge (2000) warns, the researcher must be clear about 'the ability of any adult partner to understand and interact with the child' (p.121) and this is true for any learner who relies on someone else to act as an interpreter of their communicative acts and gestures.

As well as the means of communication, Dockerell, Lewis and Lindsay (2000), drawing on ecosystemic theory, argue that attention must also be given to the context in which the research occurs, since different factors in the environment will influence how the individual responds in different contexts. For example, it is likely that a young person may respond very differently to questions asked when their parents are present from when they are alone or again when they are with their friends. Questions that the researcher should consider include: Is the setting to be naturalistic, e.g. at home, youth club, playground, shopping centre? Will the child be observed or interviewed alone or with others? Does their performance accurately reflect their competence (or opinions)?

#### *Narrative research and case study design*

Not only was I concerned to discover more about the perspectives of young people and their families, I was particularly interested in how the young people formulated their ideas

about who they wanted to become and how decisions were made during their transition from school. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber. (1998) propose that narrative research methods may be used where the researcher is investigating the significance of real-life problems of individuals as a contribution to public policy or decision-making. A number of researchers into career learning (Polkinghorn, 1990; Cochran, 1990) advocate the use of a narrative approach to explain the processes of career learning and their implications for practice and policy. This proposal stems from the development of ideas about career learning and life-span (Super, 1980) in which the concept of career is not seen as something fixed but which develops and changes over time as individuals move between different roles and contexts, a complex interaction between self and the environment. One approach to understanding more about these events and how individuals respond to them is through story, through exploring contemporaneously or retrospectively with the actor the nature of the events that occur in an individual's life, how they perceived the events, how they responded and why. Personal stories and accounts enable more to be understood about the impact of apparently chance or unexpected events which in retrospect played a significant role in shaping career paths and decisions.

Bruner (1986) regards narrative as one of the two fundamental cognitive functions, the other being logical reasoning or scientific, deductive thinking. There have been numerous attempts to define narrative although Labov (1972), who defined narrative as having the following elements, has conducted some of the most influential work:

- abstract – one or two sentences which summarise the whole story;
- orientation – context setting providing the listener with some idea about time, place, who was there etc.;
- complicating action – what happened;
- evaluation – the point of the story;
- result or resolution;
- coda – these often signal the end or the significance of a narrative, e.g. *So that was that* or *That was really important*.



Of course, not all human interactions consist of beautifully constructed narratives – conversations may consist of fragments which together the teller and the listener piece together or, as Reissman (1993) describes, ‘talk constructed around consequential events’ (p.3). Reissman goes on, ‘In qualitative interviews typically most of the talk is not narrative but question and answer exchanges, arguments and other forms of discourse’ (p.3).

According to Polkinghorne (1990), ‘the narrative scheme is the intellectual process that relates human activities to one another and makes them meaningful’ (p.94). Furthermore, the construction of the narrative in which the individual bits become part of a whole, with a beginning, middle and an end, becomes greater than the sum of the individual parts. As Danto (1985) puts it, ‘A story is an account ... of how the change from beginning to end took place’ (p.234). Links can be made between events and actions, and connections made. Of course, we do not know at the time what the outcomes of certain events will be. It is only possible to know in retrospect. Hence we can predict what we hope may happen or what we think or fear may happen, but not until after the event can we reflect on what actually happened. This approach relies on memory which is notoriously unreliable. While not possible in every case, I tried to build in opportunities for parents to predict what they thought would happen at transition planning meetings and then in retrospect reviewed what actually happened and their responses to it. Sometimes I had also been present at the meetings and this was a good opportunity for me to check out my observations of what I thought was happening. Otherwise I relied on questionnaires handed out after the meetings (see Appendix 1). Equally, in the interviews with each of the respondents, I asked what they hoped would happen in the long term and short or medium term and then to reflect on what actually happened. To the extent to which it was possible, I endeavoured to construct the research design around the principles of contemporaneous narratives (Appendices 2:1, 2:2, 2:3).

Of the research approaches that are available, case histories or case studies most easily lend themselves to narrative approaches. In this case I have chosen to use case studies

rather than case histories. What is the difference? According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), case histories provide an account of an individual's life. Case studies on the other hand seek to establish common threads and ideas and generate theory, which in this instance I was keen to do.

Case studies require boundaries and in this instance the concept of decision-making units provided the underpinning idea. Yin's (1989) definition of a case study is:

*'an empirical inquiry that:*

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when*
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and*
- in which*
- multiple sources of evidence are used'. (p.23)*

Using Yin's definition and considering one characteristic at a time, the aim of the study was to explore contemporaneous events and the influences upon them. As Miles and Huberman (1994) point out, time-ordered displays preserve the 'historical, chronological flow and permit(ing) a good look at what led to what, and when' (p.110). I wanted to know more about how young people and their families experienced the years prior to leaving school, and it was only through following them through real time that I was able to gain a better understanding. Second, some of these influences were likely to be located in the everyday lives of the individuals, but the boundaries between the decision-making process and individual, personal characteristics and strategies, the young person's disability and learning difficulties, their family, school and community as well as policy and procedural factors would be blurred. The study would require a process of speculation and exploration as I attempted to test out hypotheses and check out ideas. Third, as I have argued elsewhere, there is not a single decision-maker, but several people whose relationship goes to create a decision-making unit, so that it was necessary to gather data about the process and the influences from multiple sources using different methods.

Furthermore, the range of variables, including disability, which appear to influence the decision-making process, suggested the need to have a number of different case studies which combined different factors to avoid over-representation of any single group which might distort the process. According to Yin (*op. cit.*), these are multiple, embedded case studies, embedded because each case study contains more than one unit of analysis. In this instance, the units of analysis were the young person, their parents or carers, their teachers and the relationship between them.

Because I was also concerned to try and find out why individuals chose to take one direction or another and what happened to cause them to change their minds, the enquiry also lent itself to adopting a longitudinal approach. The study involved analysing cases that were the same or comparable from one period to the next. While in each case the pupil represented the constant, it was likely that their main carers would also remain the same. However, their teachers would probably change from one year to the next. According to Menard (1991), this is described as a prospective panel design because data is collected at distinct points for a distinct period on the same set of cases and variables. The intention was to explore the developmental changes which occurred over a defined period of time, i.e. three years spanning the school-leaving years. Nesselroade and Baltes (1979) suggest a typology of reasons for conducting longitudinal studies, one of which is to analyse the causes or determinants of intra-individual change. These changes could include what individuals do, think or things that are done to them (Menard, *op. cit.*). In this instance I was concerned to discover if and why individuals and their families changed their minds about what they wanted to happen on leaving school and what actually happened.

### **The sample**

The intention in selecting the sample of pupils was to include, as far as possible, a range of special educational needs, i.e. learning difficulties, sensory and physical impairments, and emotional and behavioural difficulties, and also to be able to take account of race,

gender, and social and economic status in the analysis as well as different locations and types of school. In the event, this proved difficult to sustain.

To also ensure that no single factor influenced the process unduly I selected two contrasting local authorities: one an Outer London borough where almost half its population come from ethnic minorities and the other a shire county with less than 4 % from ethnic minorities. The London borough is ranked as one of the most deprived boroughs in the country with 8.1 % unemployed whereas the shire county enjoyed a buoyant local economy with an unemployment rate of around 1.2%.

Students were identified by first contacting schools in each LEA. Schools were selected on the basis of their type (special, mainstream) and whether they were day, residential, all age or secondary only, as well as the nature of the special educational needs they catered for. However, it is worth noting that the descriptors used to describe children's special needs are not used consistently within and between Local Education Authorities (Daniels, Hey, Leonard & Smith, 2000) so that the official categorisation of a school does not necessarily reflect the nature of the learners who attend it (Male, 1996a; 1996b). Male's research showed quite clearly that some pupils might equally have been placed in schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD) or at moderate learning difficulties (MLD) schools while the population of pupils in SLD schools have increasingly complex needs. This fact had an effect on the selection of the sample since the SLD school in the Outer London Borough only had children at the correct age for my study, i.e. two or three years off leaving school, who had profound and complex learning difficulties. On the other hand Kim, who attended the neighbouring MLD school, might in the past or in another LEA have attended an SLD school. In addition, many pupils with special educational needs have a combination of impairments so that as well as, for example, having a physical or sensory impairment they may also experience difficulties in learning and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties.

As noted above, a further consideration was the age of pupils. I wanted, as far as possible, to ensure that by the end of the study some decision would have been reached about where the young person would go when they left their school. I therefore asked schools to select pupils who were likely to leave school within the next three years, which was of course harder to do if the school had a sixth form or FE unit attached since in general schools assumed the pupils would stay on at 16. Hence the initial ages of the pupils ranged from 13 to 16.

I also tried to ensure an adequate ratio of boys to girls in the selection of case studies although, as Daniels *et al.* (*op. cit.*) point out, boys tend to receive a disproportionate amount of additional special educational needs support. In the end the ratio was 7:5, boys to girls. Including students representing a range of ethnicity and class was more problematic. Since half the population of the Outer London borough was from ethnic minorities it was almost inevitable that the case studies and their families would be from a diverse range of backgrounds. But because I was dependent on teachers to select the cases for me and because I had a number of important variables I wished to look at, I did not consciously select for class. Hence the sample arguably does not include families from socio-economic brackets A and B. Looking back this was partly due to a failure of courage on my part in insisting on more detail about each family before I approached them. On the other hand, as Male (*op. cit.*) points out, there has been a longstanding over-representation of children from parents who are unwaged or unskilled in special education, while according to Daniels *et al.*, 'there is a strong association between children who live with a single-parent mother and all forms of SEN'(p.59).

The depth of data which were gathered over the three years balanced the relatively small size of the sample (14 falling to 12). Hammersley (1992), in discussing the contrast between survey and case study, suggests that the difference lies in the degree of detail collected. The fewer the cases, the greater the detail that can be gathered about each case. However, he also notes that this is partly tempered by the number of researchers and amount of time available for the conduct of the research. In this study, as a part-time lone

researcher, a total of 94 interviews and 20 observations were conducted combined with 25 follow-up questionnaires.

To ensure a range of cases taking account of possible influencing factors, the final sample comprised 12 young people: seven boys and five girls; four from ethnic minorities; one from a foster home; two from single-parent families; three from mainstream schools; and nine from special schools; half from a shire county and the other half from an Outer London borough.

### **Methods of enquiry**

Scott (1996) argues that, although the same methods of enquiry may be used for both qualitative and quantitative research endeavours, how those methods are used will be dictated by the research paradigm that is to be adopted. Hence in this interpretative-based study, the methods chosen needed to enable me to understand different perspectives and track the course of events over time. Four main methods of data collection were used: interviews, including telephone interviews; observation; postal questionnaires; and a field log.

### *Interviews*

Interviews are a social relationship (Bailey, 1987) and how the interviewee regards the interviewer will influence their responses. That is, their impressions of the interviewer's status and sponsors will affect what they say and the self they present. The interviewer's gender, race, class, age and appearance may also affect the relationship. It was therefore important at the outset to take time to build relationships with the young people and their parents and to establish as far as possible a non-hierarchical relationship. However, I was a white, middle-class woman who came with an official tag, no matter how hard I might try to compensate for these characteristics.

While parents or carers were interviewed in their own homes, pupils were interviewed at school (for interview schedules see Appendices 2:1, 2:2). I spent time with each pupil

before trying to set up any formal data-gathering processes. Different activities were employed with different pupils, partly depending on their needs and partly on the school's expectations and constraints. Some I spent time with in their lessons, helping with their work, while others I took out to lunch. In the event, the whole process became part of the data-gathering exercise so that there were no clear distinctions between the chat as we walked along or ate lunch and the recorded interview.

Building relationships with parents or carers was more complex (Bailey, *op. cit.*; Finch, 1993). After all, what was my role and how did I want to be seen? As a non-partisan bystander, a friend, an advocate, a source of advice and information, a counsellor? Cohen *et al.* (2000) note that in employing narrative approaches to case studies, the informant must be willing to establish a close and, at times, intimate relationship with the researcher because of the need to sustain the relationship over time. It is important for the researcher to be able to move between different types of interview from semi-structured to open. While the role evolved over time, it became apparent quite early that it was not possible to remain an objective researcher. In the interviews it quickly became clear that I possessed information that would be helpful to respondents. Over time, then, I adopted all of the roles described above with some families, so that by the end we were sad to part. With others, I remained very much on the periphery of their lives, a vague presence who came and went.

Building a relationship with the professionals was at one level more straightforward, in so far as they were familiar with what the research function entailed (for interview schedule see Appendix 2:3). But they were also more openly concerned to establish what benefits would accrue to the pupil, the school and themselves while a number wanted some guarantee of feedback from me. The imperative here was to establish a degree of professional trust and credibility demonstrating that by researching parental and pupil experiences their professional integrity would not be undermined. This was partly achieved by the process of spending time with pupils in the classroom so that the teachers could assess my capacity to relate to pupils, a kind of initiation ceremony, and partly by

promising to provide an interim report to the school. I found the expectation that I had to demonstrate my capability to relate to pupils irritating. I was, after all, an experienced teacher. What was happening, of course, was my transformation from teacher to researcher, a transition I was uncomfortable with.

The nature of the relationships and the multiple roles I adopted influenced the nature of the interaction between myself as the interviewer and the interviewee. In essence, with parents or carers and most of the pupils, the interviews became more like guided conversations (Stalker, 1998) which inevitably led to the interviewees asking questions of me in some cases. The very act of my questioning, triggered new thoughts and ideas and thus the research process itself intervened in these young people's lives and may indeed have made a difference to the course of events. Hodkinson (1995), describing a similar type of study, notes:

*'The young people we spoke to are different because we spoke to them, and what happened to them will be different because we 'intervened' in their life stories. It is impossible to say with any confidence what impact our investigations had or how significant they were.'* (p.46)

Furthermore whoever else was present in the room at the same time also influenced responses and in family homes this was not always possible to control. Family friends, cousins, grandparents all sometimes joined in. Husbands or wives would sometimes have to leave halfway through an interview and responses would alter accordingly.

### *Observation*

To observe the dynamics between the key players in the decision-making process, a series of non-participant observations of students' annual review meetings were conducted. The intention was to observe participants in their natural setting and, because of this, I had no control over when these meetings took place. These are formally convened events and governed by an external set of procedures and so I did not have any legitimate right to be



present. As a result several problems arose. First, schools did not always remember to inform me when meetings were scheduled to take place or, if they did, I was not always able to attend because of prior engagements. Second, some professionals were nervous about my attendance, ostensibly because of concerns about confidentiality, but perhaps because of concerns about a stranger observing their performance in the meetings.

On entering a group for the first time I found it necessary to explain my role. To minimise observer effects, I tried to sit within the group, since this made me appear less of an observer while at the same time not contributing to the discussion unless directly asked to do so. In one case, the fact that a student had participated in an interview with me and the quality of her responses was seen as an outstanding achievement for her. As time went on, two schools always consulted me before setting dates for meetings while several chairs of meetings requested feedback about their individual performance, which suggested that the group had become habituated to my presence.

Events at meetings were recorded by keeping a running description of what was said (Appendix 3). Several people had objected to the meetings being tape-recorded and so, in the end, I recorded events by noting what was said. This did not allow me to observe facial expressions or other body language as much as was desirable, although personal impressions and feelings were recorded both in the meeting and immediately afterwards, in a log. Important and valuable conversations often took place after the meetings were over and, again, field notes were written up immediately afterwards, endeavouring to capture the flavour of the discussion.

### *Questionnaires*

Participants in the annual review meetings were asked to complete a questionnaire on the perceived usefulness of the meetings. This was given out at the end of meetings with a stamped, addressed envelope to encourage their return. In the end, I only did this once per case study because I sensed that the participants of the meetings were resistant to

completing these on a regular basis. Therefore out of a total of 36 participants who attended nine annual review meetings, 25 returned their questionnaires.

#### *Telephone interviews*

To overcome any potential problems with literacy, it was decided to gather the views of parents by using the questionnaire as the basis of a structured telephone interview. This was considered more cost-efficient and quicker than conducting a further face-to-face interview.

#### *Field log*

Finally, a log or reflexive journal was kept in which feelings, values and assumptions were recorded. The act of writing enabled me to make connections between ideas as well as allowing me to make notes about things I wanted to follow up either as part of the fieldwork, with supervisors or in my support group. Finally, it was useful for speculating and making links with other bits of data as well substantive theories and ideas.

#### *Pilot*

In the normal course of events, research instruments are piloted to iron out any faults in the design and to identify unexpected problems. In a study such as this, however, piloting brought its own difficulties. The issues and problems I was exploring were so immediate to the individuals concerned and, given that monitoring the influence of the passage of time was integral to the design, testing out the instruments was problematic. Instead I spent some time before the study trying to anticipate any problems through discussions with two headteachers and a careers adviser. This enabled me to gauge the level of development in their practice among schools and LEAs, which was helpful in designing the interview schedules, particularly for teachers. I also concluded from these discussions that tape-recording annual reviews would not be feasible. Ideas about how to structure the sample of pupils were also generated through these early discussions.

Since I was using a semi-structured approach to interviewing I was able to adjust my questions as I went along if it was apparent that the respondent did not understand the question. Furthermore, since I was returning year after year, I had to adjust the schedule somewhat to account for this. An example of how I attempted to adapt the parents schedule is given in Appendix 4.

### **Validity and reliability**

Some researchers, particularly those working in the interpretative field, question the importance of validity and reliability, and consequently the necessity of making their findings generalisable (Schofield, 1993). Hodkinson (1995), for example, questions whether his data would be replicable, a fundamental tenet of reliability:

*'It was the questions we asked, the ways in which we asked them and the ways in which we analysed the resulting data that largely determined what we found out about the subject under investigation. A different research team might well have investigated the same programme and come out with different areas of interest and different details about the experiences of their subjects.'* (p.46)

So if the unique, reflexive relationships that exist between researcher and the researched are characteristic of most qualitative research, are issues of validity and reliability of any concern? There are alternative perspectives.

Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) state categorically that issues of generalisability must be of concern to the case study researcher since if they are not, this will limit the intrinsic value of their research. The aim is not to produce generalisable laws or rules but to find parallels as well as differences between similar situations. There are a number of ways in which generalisability can be attended to and which I used as part of the design of the study. First, I used more than one case study site. While the numbers were still comparatively small (12) by using multi-sites this increased my chances of providing a degree of typicality. Second, by conducting a longitudinal study I was able to create some

internal validity in so far as data were collected at two or more distinct time periods providing what Cohen *et al.* (*op. cit.*) refer to as ‘time triangulation’ (p.113). I was then able to compare the data between the time periods. There were, of course, within-student as well as contextual variables. For instance, the students got older and in some cases they became less willing to co-operate or to divulge information. Home or school circumstances changed or new national or local policies were introduced. Standardisation was also difficult where I lost touch with one young person.

I also attempted to enhance validity by combining multiple sources of data – interview, observation, documentary and questionnaire data were all used to build a picture of each decision-making unit. I employed different levels of data gathering, both individual and group, combining different levels of triangulation. I did not, however, get the respondents to validate the data themselves by asking them to read my interpretation of their responses. Some degree of triangulation was reached by asking respondents to predict what they thought would happen, what they hoped would happen and then to reflect on what actually happened.

If the traditional definition of reliability is used, i.e. that of replicability, then this seems an altogether more problematic concept. However, thinking in the context of qualitative studies proposes that reliability is as much about being true to real life, context specific and providing detailed or ‘thick’ description as being able to replicate the same research design to produce the same responses. As Schofield (2000) points out, ‘any piece of qualitative research is likely to contain so many individual descriptive and conceptual components that replicating it on a piece-by-piece basis would be a major undertaking’ (p.71).

### **Ethical considerations in the research design**

#### *Access*

In most studies of this type, professionals act as gatekeepers to gaining access to pupils and their families. This raises a number of important problems. First, professionals

themselves may be reluctant to get involved because of the incursion into their time. They may also be concerned about what the pay-offs will be both for the school and the student – what benefits will be accrued. Once their permission is given, then it is necessary to gain permission from parents and students. Several new difficulties arise. The researcher becomes dependent on a third party to select and make the initial approach to the participants in the study and, however carefully professionals have been briefed, there is a degree of loss of control because personal biases and agendas are almost bound to enter the selection process. Furthermore, once parents have agreed to be approached, it may be assumed that their children would automatically agree to be part of the study.

### *Intrusion*

Since one of the main purposes of this study was to inquire into the experiences of young people and their parents or carers, it is axiomatic that there will be a degree of intrusion into individuals' private lives. To take account of this, all the parents and carers were written to and asked when they would like to be contacted to arrange the first interview and where they would like that interview to take place (see Appendix 5). All chose to be interviewed in their own homes.

However, one set of parents who originally agreed to be part of the study was never subsequently interviewed, while it took three years of intermittent attempts to interview the mother of a second pupil. Why was this? There are a number of possible explanations including feelings of inadequacy, suspicion of outsiders and professionals, as well as logistical and practical reasons. For example, when spoken to over the phone one mother said she felt she had nothing to say. It also subsequently emerged that her husband was in prison. The other mother kept moving house and had two different partners during the course of the study.

A further characteristic of this study was its longitudinal nature. As already stated, pupils grew older, their circumstances changed and, although they each developed at different rates and in different ways, some became more self-conscious and inhibited as the study

progressed and seemed more reluctant to respond to my questions. One of the pupils who became progressively shyer, was also a school refuser, and began to mistrust my questions, possibly seeing me as one of the people who were trying to get her to go back to school.

### *Data collection*

Two aspects of collecting data from the pupils presented particular ethical challenges: using alternative means of communication; and lack of understanding of abstract concepts. Two students used British Sign Language as their main means of communication, which I was unable to use. I therefore had to rely on communicators. The role and status of the communicator influenced not only what was asked but how the answer was interpreted and so a third layer of bias and opinion was added to the dialogue. To resolve this problem, and because the students' level of literacy was good, it was possible to use writing as the main method of communication (see Appendix 6 for an example).

Difficulties in understanding were more difficult to overcome. As well as the influences described above, I have also described in the previous chapter how the type of question that is asked can influence responses, the questioner's tone of voice, the complexity of the question. When the respondent does not understand the question, they are more likely to give the reply they think the questioner wants to hear or to be influenced by others. The concept of future is difficult to grasp, and it became necessary to find different ways of eliciting information about some young people and their aspirations. Drawing on the language of the classroom and the playground, I used words or phrases such as 'dream', 'imagine', 'guess' or 'what do you really, really want?' to encourage students to speculate about their future lives.

For one student even this level of fantasising was impossible and she also possessed no spoken language. Instead, with the help of her teacher, I used photographs and pictures to establish her likes and dislikes. The teacher was skilled at checking and double-checking

her responses which depended on being able to discriminate between minute responses, e.g. eye blinks, the turn of her head. As an outsider I was not aware of, or sufficiently sensitive towards, the implications of these tiny movements. By using tangible prompts of this kind I was, of course, defining her field of response. She could only choose from what I presented so that I also spent two days with her, observing and sometimes joining in with the activities in the classroom, which enabled me to get a better insight into her needs and wants.

### *Confidentiality*

All research has to be clear about its code of conduct on confidentiality and the need to maintain anonymity in reporting any findings. However, triangulated studies, which are conducted over a sustained period of time, can present new challenges and create unforeseen professional dilemmas.

It is important to respect the right to confidentiality of each member of the triangle: student, parent or carer and teacher. Parents or carers in particular may be concerned that any explicit or implicit criticism of the school should not get back to the school for fear of damaging their child's relationship with teachers, itself an indication of the power that teachers are perceived as having. Equally, once some parents had been given information about their rights, I was concerned that this may also jeopardise my relationship with the school. Pupils gave me information which I said was confidential but in one case I felt that to pass information on may help the school to work more effectively with that pupil.

As the study progressed the network of links was built up, increasing the opportunity for potentially compromising or professionally difficult circumstances to arise. Choices were constantly having to be made about what questions to ask and whether to share or withhold information from someone who might have found it useful.

### *Withdrawal*

Having built up a relationship, I then had to withdraw at the end of the research. This felt exploitative as if I had used the families for my own purposes and then left them when I had met my own needs. There were genuine feelings of sadness expressed by some parents as I said that this would be my last visit, and it was hard to explain the reasons. Somehow, just being able to talk about the processes that they were going through had helped them to cope with their fears of the unknown. I felt it necessary to promise to send them copies of any reports arising from the research. In the end it felt important to give them something back.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Subjects lived in two contrasting localities: an Outer London borough and a shire county. Table 3:1 shows the sample of pupils, the nature of their learning difficulty or disability, their educational placement and the number of times they were contacted. Each phase of data collection occurred on a yearly basis and consisted of an interview with the pupil, their parents or carers, their teachers and, possibly, attendance at their annual review. Ideally, I tried to interview everyone before the annual review and to see each young person separately from their parents and/or their teachers. This was not always possible, however. Questionnaires were sent out to participants after one of the review meetings while telephone interviews were held with parents based on the questionnaire. While at the outset all but one pupil had a statement of special educational needs, by the end of the project all were in receipt of a statement.



**Table 3:1 Phases of data collection**

<b>Pupil</b>	<b>Nature of special educational need</b>	<b>School location</b>	<b>Extent of data collection</b>
David	Deaf, day pupil and then weekly boarder at special school	SC	Three phases
Andrew	Deaf, weekly boarder at special school	SC	Three phases
Nasreen	Blind, day pupil at special school and then residential college	OL	Three phases
*	Blind, day pupil at special school and then residential school	OL	One wave
Stuart	Behavioural difficulties, day pupil at comprehensive	SC	Three phases
Kim	Learning difficulties, day pupil at special school	OL	Three phases
*	Learning difficulties, day pupil at comprehensive	OL	Two phases
Malcolm	Learning difficulties, day pupil at special school	OL	Three phases
Sandra	Physical disabilities and learning difficulties, day pupil at special school	SC	Three phases
Gavin	Emotional and behavioural difficulties, day pupil at comprehensive	OL	Two phases
James	Physical disabilities, weekly boarder at special school	SC	Three phases
Costas	Learning difficulties, day pupil at special school	OL	Three phases
Kylie	Learning difficulties, day pupil at comprehensive	SC	Three phases
Maria	Profound and complex learning difficulties, day pupil at special school	OL	Two phases

**Key** OL – Outer London borough SC – Shire county

\* Not included in final data analysis

The second table shows the different types of data collection, the sources of data and the amount gathered from each source. A more detailed breakdown of dates and frequency of data collection is shown in Appendix 7.

**Table 3:2 Quantity and type of data collection**

<i>Sources of data</i>	<i>Interviews</i>	<i>Observations</i>	<i>Questionnaires</i>	<i>Telephone interviews</i>
<i>Pupils</i>	35	n/a	n/a	n/a
<i>Parents (alone or together)</i>	31	n/a	n/a	7
<i>Teachers</i>	26	n/a	15	n/a
<i>Others</i>	2	n/a	10	n/a
<i>Annual review meetings</i>	n/a	20	n/a	n/a

There was no clear distinction between collecting the data and beginning the analysis. As Ely *et al.* (1997) note, these two processes happen simultaneously at times or at least inform one another, 'The interweaving of data collection and analysis is highly transactional, each activity shedding new light on and enriching the other' (p.165). I began to see threads and patterns emerging within and between the cases and to make links with other ideas during my interviews with respondents. The difficulty came in continuing to suspend my judgement. Equally, as Ely *et al.* also point out, the process of data analysis continued once I had started to write and, had time allowed, would have led to my returning to the field for further data collection and verification.

As a first step in analysing the interview data, tapes were transcribed and then listened to several times to fill in any gaps and to identify inferred meanings through tone of voice (see Appendices 8 and 9). As Cohen *et al.* (2000) point out, researchers in the social sciences tend to use a combination of deductive and inductive approaches in the data analysis process. I already had ideas from the literature about the kind of patterns of ideas I was looking for (see Appendix 10) but I began by reading the transcripts for meaning, case study by case study. Adapting Miles and Huberman's (1994) strategy, I prepared summary sheets at the end of the second and third years of data gathering which attempted to summarise the main points from each interview, main themes that arose, possible explanations or speculations, links to substantive or meta- theories that occurred to me and finally any methodological issues that I needed to take account of (for an example see Appendix 11). The summaries were fairly free-flowing accounts, but the process of writing gave me a feel for the unfolding narrative of the events and a sense of gestalt. In other words the whole became greater than the sum of the individual parts.

The next stage was to prepare what Miles and Huberman (*ibid*) refer to as 'case-ordered displays'. I wanted to reduce these accounts even further to try to get to the heart of each story in relation to the decision-making process. I wanted to be clear about the nature of the decision that was having to be made. What were the choices? I also wanted to know

who favoured what option and what these different opinions looked like visually. Thus I produced maps or 'decision trees' which showed individual patterns of response (see Appendix 12). This also enabled me to see whose opinion seemed to hold sway. Finally I wanted to know what patterns or themes might emerge across cases – I wanted to know whether it was possible to group decision-making processes into types. I therefore analysed each case by events and the responses of different players to those events across time (see Appendices 13:1; 13:2; 13:3; 13:4). Sometimes these included intended or aspirational actions and predicted responses which respondents were then subsequently asked to reflect on as part of the story of the decision-making process. These charts helped me to identify those events that seemed significant to the respondents in the general flow of events.

A fourth level of data analysis was needed because I wanted to know what the influences seemed to be that governed an individual's aspirations and what influences governed their responses to the events as they unfolded. Furthermore, I wanted to know what influence they seemed to have on each other. To do this I had to return to the raw data and probe more deeply into individual accounts, observation and questionnaire data and my field log. To complete this task I used pattern analysis. As already noted, I had some sense of the ideas and theories that might help to explain my data and I used these to formulate a series of codes or categories against which to code the data. Each code was accompanied by a definition. These were rapidly discarded as I found my data did not fit these prescribed groupings. Instead I formulated new codes (see Appendix 14). I found I needed to read and reread the data several times looking for the smallest fragment of significant data and then work towards grouping or clustering these into categories, to which I ascribed a code. I was using what Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to as 'progressive focusing' because I was gradually reframing my initial hunches and ideas as I got more deeply into my data. Sometimes in an attempt to begin to cluster ideas or begin to develop theory I used metaphors to capture the essence of an idea. Often these were phrases used by the respondents themselves, e.g. *I'm going round in circles* or *You never know what's round the corner*. While potentially everyday phrases, these kinds of

comments often served to illustrate very graphically much more complex ideas. Although not carried out systematically, I also looked for patterns in the use of language such as words that conveyed something about the respondent's frame of mind and how they saw themselves in relation to others. Finally, I also looked for and counted instances of particular occurrences, e.g. attendance at annual reviews by different agencies.

As noted, the very act of writing itself also contributed to the analysis of the data. I found that as I progressed I did not tell the whole of an individual's story but that I introduced parts of it gradually, depending on the lens through which I was telling the story: the young person, the parents, the professionals. In this way I found myself introducing a sense of suspense into the narrative by gradually revealing different perspectives, peeling back the layers of events. Ely *et al.* (*op. cit.*) refer to this process as 'layered stories' (p.78).

### **Theory building**

The development of theories and more general ideas about what was happening flowed from the data analysis processes. I have already described how from the start I began to make links to other reading and other examples from within the data as I began the process of analysis. My purpose in developing theories about the experiences of young people with special educational needs and their parents was, using Ball's (1991) term, to 'increase understanding and insights' (p.189).

Using the following techniques and strategies supported theory building:

- challenging and being challenged about my interpretation of the data and its fit with proposed theoretical frameworks, in other words trying to stay close to the data (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1993);
- looking for exceptions or examples that ran contrary to my proposed explanations, or what Miles and Huberman (*op. cit.*) refer to as 'outliers' (p.263);
- keeping a reflexive journal. This was particularly valuable for noting down any ideas or connections that occurred to me immediately after leaving an interview or

observation when I could go and write down my thoughts while they were still fresh in my mind;

- presentations to academic audiences at seminars or conferences thereby having to defend my ideas or have them challenged;
- through the kinaesthetic processes of drawing maps of ideas or diagrams as well as through writing;
- continuing to read and talk to career learning theorists particularly outside the field of special education, including members of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling and Dr Phil Hodgkinson.

### **Summary**

The design of this enquiry has unfolded rather like the stories of the young people and the decision-making processes. Although I started out with a problem I wanted to research and a relatively clear research design, it was not until I became embroiled in the actual processes did many of the complexities which I have described in this chapter become apparent to me. Often problems arose or ideas occurred as I went along which led me to return to the literature for help or enlightenment. The process of conducting the research has been as much a journey of discovery as the substantive topic I was researching, to which I now turn.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Decision-makers and the Decision-making Processes**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter introduces the 12 case studies and describes the kinds of decisions that each young person and their families were having to make as they approached the time to leave school. While these choices may be familiar, what is less familiar is how such decisions are made. The Code of Practice guidance (1994; 2001) on transition assumes a rational and logical model of decision-making in which options are refined and support provided and which only partially reflects the complexities of reality. The seven types of decision-making processes which are identified here are an attempt to describe some of these complexities, largely from the point of view of young people and their parents, before going on in subsequent chapters to explore some of the underlying influences on these processes and their outcomes.

#### **The case studies**

Brief background details about each student and their families are given in Table 4:1 and detailed pen portraits are included in Appendix 15. The information contained in the Table is intended to provide an initial flavour of the young people and their immediate families, that is those people who made up what I have termed the 'core' of the case studies. Twelve of the original 14 case studies have been used as a basis for the following analysis. One set of data was excluded on the grounds that I only succeeded in interviewing the student and his teacher once and in spite of repeated attempts I failed to gain access to his family. The second was excluded on the grounds that I was unable to gather any information from her school because of the SENCO's reluctance to collaborate in the study.

Case study is defined as the network of people surrounding each young person involved in what has been described as the 'decision-making unit' (Killeen, 1996). Each 'unit' can be characterised as having a central and constant core of involvement by the student and their parent(s), both of whom had a high degree of investment in the outcome of the decision-making processes although with varying degrees of involvement in the process itself. The further out from this core one travels, the more the patterns of involvement by others shifted and became more mutable. For example, some students' teachers changed year on year; new careers officers took over as others left; therapists and social workers were involved as students' needs demanded.



**Table 4:1 Profiles of case study pupils and their families**

Project name	Age of first contact	Gender	Disability	Education path	Aspirations	Mother's job	Father's job	Ethnicity
Andrew Bailey	14	M	Profoundly deaf	Residential special school for deaf, located in mainstream 2 <sup>nd</sup> school. Specialist college for deaf and mainstream college	Electrician or film star	Unknown	Electrician	White
Costas Demetrios	15	M	Moderate learning difficulties	Day special school and then FE unit in same school	To have a girlfriend	Hairdresser	Post Office transport manager	Greek-Cypriot
David Francis	13	M	Profoundly deaf	Day special school for deaf. Residential specialist college for deaf and mainstream college	To become an actor. Look after animals	BSL Communicator	Construction worker and university student	White
Gavin Stone	14	M	Emotional and behavioural difficulties	Comprehensive school: excluded. 2 <sup>nd</sup> comprehensive school: truanted	Zookeeper. Get married, have two children, a dog and a snake	Foster mother: Prison officer Birth mother: Unknown	Foster father: Unknown Birth father: Unknown	Black Afro-Caribbean
James Simpson	15	M	Physical disabilities	Residential special school. Residential specialist college	A policeman but later office work. Live independently in a flat	Nursery nurse	Plumber and then made redundant	White
Kim Doyle	16	F	Moderate learning difficulties	Day special school and then FE unit in the same school	Computer work in a bank. Go to local youth club	Classroom assistant	Supermarket store man	White

Table 4:1 (cont.)

Project name	Age of first contact	Gender	Disability	Education path	Aspirations	Mother's job	Father's job	Ethnicity
Kylie Long	13	F	Moderate learning difficulties	Various comprehensive schools and then dropped out. Work experience in nursery and then dropped out.	Unsure – computing; nursery nurse; work with animals.	Various – shop assistant; barmaid	Unknown	White
Malcolm Lewis	15	M	Moderate learning difficulties	Day special school and then FE unit in same school. Dropped out in Year 12.	Van driver's mate. Live in house in Enfield with cat and dog.	Full-time housewife	Unemployed	White
Maria Constandis	18	F	Profound and complex learning difficulties	Day special school and residential care.	Unknown	FE lecturer	Unknown	Greek-Cypriot
Nasreen Hussein	15	F	Blind	Day special school. Residential specialist college.	Psychologist or barrister.	Full-time housewife	Self-employed	Pakistani
Sandra Harding	15	F	Physical disabilities and learning difficulties	Day special school. P/T mainstream college.	Not to leave home.	Personnel assistant	Unemployed	White
Stuart Brown	13	M	Emotional and behavioural difficulties and learning difficulties	Comprehensive school.	Carpenter.	School dinner lady	Lorry driver	White

### **What kind of decisions were being made?**

Since all the students in this study were preparing to leave school, the decisions which they and/or their parents or carers faced were directly or indirectly related to their post-school lives. Arguably, decision-making implies making a choice between a range of options. In actual fact, as other commentators have noted (Riddell *et al.*, 1999), real choices for many young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are limited by structural factors so that realistic alternatives are often not available. Many of the choices with which these young people and their families were engaged could be more fairly described as dilemmas where the choice was between the prescribed and expected route dictated by custom and practice, remaining within the system and the unknown alternatives which lay outside.

For six of the students and their parents the decisions concerned residential placements. Sometimes, as in the case of Sandra and Maria, this meant deciding whether to go to local or residential provision. For Andrew, David and James the theoretical choice to be made was between local and residential specialist colleges because that was what the official procedures demanded but in actual fact the real choice they and their parents faced was which residential college to choose. Finally Nasreen had already decided which residential college she wanted to go to – it was a question of persuading her father to let her go.

At the same time, like other youngsters of their age, Andrew, David, Nasreen and James were also thinking about their longer-term job prospects and the implications for the courses they should choose – should Nasreen become a psychologist or a barrister and if so what were the implications for her choice of A levels? What were Andrew's employment prospects if he chose to do an electronics course and would David ever get a job as an actor if he did a drama course? If James could not become a policeman then what could he do? His teacher said he was disorganised so was business studies really a sensible choice? So these were the choices they had to make, the outcomes of which were

uncertain and they were engaged in what Braybrooke and Lindblom (1963) term 'the science of muddling through'.

For Stuart, Costas and Malcolm and their families the choice was about whether to stay in education or leave and try to get a job, whereas their respective schools assumed that they would each go on to college and that there was no decision to be made. For Stuart, who was due to leave school at 16, the choice was college or employment whereas it was assumed by their school that both Costas and Malcolm would remain in the school's further education unit and then continue to college. But the decision about whether Malcolm should leave school and try to get a job was, like Kim, also governed by his parents' attitudes towards allowing him to travel independently.

Finally, Kylie and Gavin should have been making choices related to their Key Stage 4 options and what they wanted to do when they left school. Yet, despite the best efforts of their teachers and others to retain them in the system, Kylie dropped out of school and Gavin was excluded.

### **How were the decisions made?**

Despite the almost predictable nature of some of these decisions, their true complexity is only revealed by looking more closely at the process itself in order to understand how better to support young people and their families. This study is not so concerned with the kind of choices that are made and the students' destinations but *how* the decisions were made – the decision-making processes – and the influences on those processes. This next section focuses on the nature of these processes, suggesting seven possible types. They represent a hierarchy of intention ranging from those that were conscious decisions in which the players in the process were more or less fully engaged to those that were scarcely conscious decisions at all and that happened by default.

**Table 4:2 Range of decision-making types**

	Type
1	Consensus decisions in which options are explored and agreement is gradually built up over time
2	Decisions that appear to be negotiated among the key players but although not all options are fully explored a resolution is eventually reached
3	Decisions that are made but then are modified by unexpected, external events
4	Incremental decisions in which one decision depends on the outcomes of another
5	Decisions that are made by individuals with or without the agreement of others and which are acted upon alone
6	Decisions made by individuals that are blocked by others
7	Decisions made by default

These different types of decision-making processes are not, of course, mutually exclusive. Several types were sometimes combined to reach a particular outcome. For example, a decision may not be acted on because of differences of opinion between the main players (type 6) but an unexpected or external event can overcome the stumbling block and action is taken whether or not everyone agrees (type 5). The descriptions that follow illustrate these different decision-making processes by describing the aspirations of the young people and their families, what happened in practice and the variety of responses to these events. At this point, however, no attempt is made to explain the underlying reasons for the responses or the factors that seem to influence them for this is the focus of the rest of the study.

### *1. Consensus decision-making*

These are decisions where agreement is built up over time during which options are explored and where the key players are actively engaged in the process. Their task is then to ensure that what has been decided happens. Andrew's story is typical of this type of process.

Andrew was profoundly deaf and relied mainly on sign language for communication. He had a pleasant, open face although he would often look very serious when he was concentrating. He had attended a school for deaf and hearing-impaired pupils since he was eight and at the time of our first meeting he was boarding at the school on a weekly basis. The upper school was based in a local secondary school as part of the LEA's policy to promote inclusion. Thirty per cent of his timetable was spent in mixed classes during which he received signed support.

There seemed to be an unspoken agreement from the beginning between Andrew's parents and his teacher that the most appropriate destination for Andrew on leaving school would be a residential college. For them, the only question was, which one? Yet it was clear from my initial meeting with Andrew in 1996 that the option of attending a local college had not been presented to him – it was not part of the culture of the school and, from my conversations with his parents, it was clear that they were sceptical about the quality of local further education provision.

Andrew already had some idea about the subjects he needed to study to become an electrician and he knew he needed to go to college to obtain a qualification, but he was clearly surprised to learn about the existence of local colleges. This is what he wrote:

Int.        *Do you want to go away to college or go to one near your home?*

Andrew    *I don't know. I want to know what it look like.*

Int.        *Do you mean you want to know what the college looks like?*

Andrew    *I like it or don't like it... Do you know where college is near my home?*

Despite his mother saying that she thought it was too soon to begin to think about the future and that she just wanted him to be happy, it was clear that both parents had been giving it some thought. Mrs Bailey had learned about the provision at the local college from a friend of hers. She said:

*'I began to learn different stories about it and I think it is a normal college but there is a group of people she (her friend) works with... a few of them are deaf and the rest aren't but they are all what we call mature students, I think, not 16 to 18 ones. I think they tend to be 20 up to 30 and they are all mentally retarded and some of them just happen to be deaf as well and I thought if that is the only facility ... I don't agree with them all being in a class together.'*

His parents wanted him to be with his intellectual equals as well as with peers he could communicate with. They had discussed the relative merits of two residential specialist colleges with Andrew's teacher who had recommended Denton College as there he would have the opportunity to work alongside hearing students at a local college.

In March 1996 Andrew's Year 10 review was held. However, Andrew said that he had not decided whether he wanted to go to a local or residential college. In the discussion that ensued it was apparent that the school, LEA staff and his parents all preferred the residential option. This sense of solidarity was further evoked by the language that Andrew's teacher used to describe the FEFC's application procedure for funding a residential specialist college place, including phrases such as 'starts being a battle', 'sometimes a struggle', 'nightmare'. From the teacher's point of view a de facto decision had been taken and now it was a question of outwitting the authorities.

Despite his school's and parents' opinions, Andrew seemed genuinely to want to find out about his local college options and because it was part of the standard procedure he visited two local colleges, Brayborough and John Brown, as well as two residential

specialist colleges, Denton and Southlands. In the end, Andrew preferred Denton College where he would live alongside deaf students but mix with hearing students on local college courses. At John Brown there was a 'very small' electrical course while at Brayborough, although he was happy with the course itself, there were, he said, 'loads of hearing (people)'. The college had failed to provide an interpreter and the careers officer described it as 'not a good visit'. He rejected Southlands College because the course he wanted was not available.

However, a problem occurred when both the local colleges offered him a place. In the eyes of the Funding Council, such offers would be likely to supersede any preference of Andrew and his parents for a specialist college placement. What could they do? The careers adviser and his teacher both agreed a joint strategy was required and they again invoked the language of battle. It was necessary to 'prepare ourselves and cover all our tracks on the first application'.

By June of his final year at school, the Funding Council gave approval for Andrew to go to the college of his choice but the two local colleges had both written letters which, according to Mr Bailey, were guarded in their rejection of Andrew. As his father said:

*'They obviously weren't going to sell themselves short ... make out they weren't capable of coping with him. But they did more or less put over that there wasn't any other deaf student taking that course. Hadn't been any other deaf students taking that course either...'*

It had been an anxious time for the family from March through to July as they waited for the Funding Council's decision.

So, in the end the favoured option of Andrew's parents and his teacher was realised and Andrew also came to agree with them, once he had apparently satisfied himself about local options. Obstacles were overcome as a feeling of solidarity was built up among the



key players as they tried to find ways of outwitting the Funding Council's procedures in what was, from the school's and LEA's points of view, the annual ritual of applying to specialist colleges.

## *2. Quasi-negotiated decisions – 'Going round in circles'*

Once the statutory school-leaving age was passed the decision about whether to stay or leave education was one that affected three of the young people in this study: Malcolm, Stuart and Costas. The decision process which involved Costas and his parents was ostensibly negotiated but the opposing views were not fully explored even though a resolution was eventually reached.

Costas attended his local all-age special school for children with moderate learning difficulties where he had been for four years. He lived at home with his parents, and two siblings, an older brother and younger sister. Both his parents, Mr and Mrs Demetrios, had emigrated to England from Cyprus before they were married. He went to a local comprehensive school for one morning a week where he was doing an Art GCSE course.

As with Malcolm and Stuart, Costas' teachers and his careers officer felt he should remain in education and in this case school, when he reached 16. His parents, Mr and Mrs Demetrios, however, had other ideas and questioned the benefits of remaining in education. They were dissatisfied with his placement at the special school feeling that he was held back by the other pupils, too much time was spent doing practical work and the school had low expectations of their pupils. His parents disagreed about the best course of action if he was to leave school: his father wanted him to learn a trade, his mother felt this to be beyond Costas' capabilities. After all, she said, 'I think a mother know better than what the father does.' In Year 11, Costas went into the Upper School where he joined a school/college link programme for two days a week. At his annual review that year his mother raised the possibility of him leaving school and asked to meet with the careers adviser to discuss a scheme run by Marks and Spencer that she had heard about from her neighbour. The deputy headteacher advised against Costas leaving school at this point.

- Deputy Head     *Personally I wouldn't recommend he leaves now. He needs to get more confidence – he'll have a say about where he wants to go. We will work with the careers service... she'll get to know him. She'll come to a meeting like this.*
- Mother           *Listen, I don't know... I only suggested.*
- Teacher          *Still, it's an interesting opportunity – he could go to M and S.*

Having made the suggestion, Mrs Demetrios was covered with confusion and backed down very rapidly in agreeing with the school that Costas should stay on and agreeing that the school should arrange a work experience placement with Marks. Nevertheless, she wanted to know more about the scheme. Costas, for his part, was unclear about what he wanted to do and by the time the review came round again the issue as to whether Costas should leave school was back on the agenda. Mrs Demetrios was still keen on the Marks and Spencer's option, where Costas had worked for a day. If he was to leave, the school preferred him to go to college but Costas was confused, saying at one point, 'My head's going round in circles.'

So, in the end it was agreed that Costas would stay at school for a further year. Mrs Demetrios hoped he would eventually get a place on the Marks and Spencer's scheme; his father still wanted him to 'get a trade', possibly joining a youth training scheme, while Costas remained uncertain. In this instance one could argue that there were no real choices available, or at least what choices there were involved Costas and his parents in quite high risks if he was to withdraw from education. There was no guarantee that he would succeed in getting a place on a work-training scheme, yet his parents were driven by their dissatisfaction and disappointment in the education Costas was receiving. In all the discussions that occurred, the concerns of Mr and Mrs Demetrios were never fully explored, despite the fact that Costas' Year 10 teacher shared many of their perceptions. By the time Costas reached the Upper School, the staff's preference was clearly the safe

option – school followed by college and in the end it was this route that his parents (and Costas) chose.

### *3. 'Fate takes a hand'*

There were several examples of chance or unexpected events pushing decisions in one direction or another. Sometimes, as in Maria's case described below, sudden events occurred which confirmed an already decided course of action. On other occasions, as in the instance of Sandra and her parents described more fully later in this study, such events helped to transform or modify decisions. The decision of Nasreen to stay at college for three years is an example of how her initially well-defined plans became modified by subsequent events but also how she tried to use unexpected and potentially upsetting events to her own advantage.

When I first encountered Nasreen she was a day pupil at a local special school for the blind and was taking nine GCSEs, some of which she was studying for at a local comprehensive. She lived at home with her parents, Mr and Mrs Hussein, her two older sisters, one of whom was married, and her younger brother who was also blind. Both her sisters went to college. She believed that she was a disappointment to her father who wanted a son.

Her ambition was to become a clinical psychologist. To achieve this, she planned to go to university after attending a residential specialist college to do four A levels: biology, sociology, English literature and history. She described her interest in psychology as stemming from her own need for counselling as a result of depression. She believed that she provided a source of solace and comfort to others and she gave the reasons for her wish to study psychology as follows:

*'As a child I suffered horrible depression, I don't know the reason for it and for that reason I would not like others to go through what I have been through. I have often contemplated suicide, for example. It has been quite bad... because I think integration*

*was also the cause because they said by the way you are going to be integrated next year, get used to the fact... and I think it is partly because I want to study psychology to understand what goes on in the scenes behind the mind... I have put myself out for people so much I don't realise it myself so that whenever you ask people to do something for you they will either not do it or forget. I can truthfully say I have not done that and if I make a promise I make it because I know I can keep it. ....Often it gives me a lot of pleasure to listen to other people and try to get their problems out into the open, simply because I know exactly what they are suffering.'*

Having obtained the necessary grades in her GCSEs, Nasreen progressed to St. Stephen's College as planned and followed three of the four A level programmes she had wanted. However, in her second year at college she was told by her doctors that she must have one of her eyes removed. This was devastating news. Apparently an earlier operation had gone wrong and her doctors had decided that this was the only course of action. Noting how carefully she had mapped out her course of action she commented, 'Isn't it amazing how things change so quickly?'

Nasreen decided to stay on at school for a further year. Before hearing the news of the operation she had already begun to explore the idea of becoming a lawyer. She still wanted to read psychology at university but then take six-month conversion course to a law degree as she was considering becoming a barrister. In the previous year she had taken part in some mock trials which had rekindled an earlier interest in the law. The trial in which she had played the barrister had got a guilty plea and she reduced the plaintiff to tears – 'I felt really sorry for her' – though she did not sound sorry but more excited by her own skills! She went on:

*'My parents used to say I would make a good barrister. I used to think law was boring but now I'm not so sure... I've always been a debative (sic) sort of person, way back. People always said I should go into the law... Friends, family and, especially after December's performance at the mock trial, the school.'*

This was, however, only a possible alternative. Her parents were worried about how she would travel from court to court, there was heavy competition and she might find a further two years after her initial degree too much. She might also have found that she preferred psychology after all but she 'would have found out more by now if the medical stuff had not diverted me. I really wanted to go to university next year.' She continued, 'Sometimes fate takes a hand and you get pulled down to earth. But I am trying to see something positive in a negative situation.'

To relieve the pressure on herself, Nasreen decided to do two A levels in her second year instead of three and then to stay on for a further year to do her third A level and one AS level after which she intended to apply to university. She used the operation as an opportunity to strengthen her chances of getting into university, particularly as she wanted to widen her career options.

During my final interview with her, Nasreen asked whether her experiences were common to those of other young people – 'Am I the same?' I responded that her feelings and experiences were both common and distinctive: her description of how her views and ideas were being formulated were common but her determination and the way she was apparently dealing with such traumatic and unexpected news was quite unique. In this case an unexpected event had caused her to alter a planned course of action and the changes were being used to gain some possible longer-term advantages. Instead of closing down opportunities, she was instead using her enforced extra year at school as a means of supporting her wish to widen her career options.

#### *4. Incremental decisions or the 'science of muddling through'*

This type of decision-making is best described by Braybrooke and Lindblom's (1970) term 'disjointed incrementalism' (p.81). These are decisions where one decision can influence the outcomes of another: unless we can decide what to do about a), we can not decide what to do about b). In Chapter 2, I referred also to the fact that Braybrooke and

Lindblom maintain that paucity of information in complex situations can lead people to make smaller, incremental decisions. Lack of information which led to difficulties in seeing a way forward characterised the decisions surrounding James and his future. James's father, in describing his feelings about the process, noted, 'That's the difficulty – actually seeing the direction.'

Sometimes in the end compromises are reached or action is taken anyway. The study threw up a number of such examples. For example, Malcolm wanted to leave school but according to the school and his mother he needed to be able to travel independently first. His father did not agree to Malcolm using public transport alone and an extended debate began. In the end, Malcolm took matters into his own hands by dropping out of school and getting a temporary job with his uncle.

For James and his parents the decision was related to his long-term career choice and the course he should choose at college. A wheelchair user, James had been at the same special school since he was two and a half years old and he saw himself staying at school for a further two years when I first met him in Year 11. His family home was 15 miles away from the school and he boarded on two nights a week. He had two brothers – one older and one younger. He described himself as an active and sociable person.

James had been encouraged by his parents in thinking about the future which his mother suggested was her way of dealing with her own anxieties about James's future. She noted:

*'I asked to see someone in careers a couple of years ago, because I was that worried about what he could do and she more or less said come back when he is a little older. I can't do anything yet. It seems to be the ongoing thing, you know, we will look at it soon but not just yet.'*

Indeed, when we first met, Mr and Mrs Simpson had very little concrete information about not only James's longer-term options, though they mentioned two residential colleges, but also what he would do the following year in the sixth form.

*'...I would like some idea about what James will be doing in the sixth form and where he is going to after the sixth form because we are coming up to a big jump now from the fifth year to the sixth form. I have been told there is a change in the way things work but I don't really know what it is, so I would like to have more information on that and, as I say, what the options are college-wise.'*

Above all his parents were anxious that James became as independent as possible, with a *'proper job, not sort of sitting in a sheltered workshop-type place, I would like him to be out in the real world working with normal people and doing something that will make him happy. That is what I really want, I want him to be happy at the end of the day.'*

Consequently his mother was very disappointed at the first review in May 1996 when any attempt by her to raise the issue of James's future was circumvented. His teacher had said that in the longer term she envisaged James going to a residential college since he could become socially isolated in a mainstream college. However, it was assumed by the school that in the first place James would proceed into the sixth form. His mother requested more information about the sixth form saying that they knew nothing about what James would be doing. They also wanted to talk to the Careers Service about James getting a Saturday job but the teacher replied that there were two more years during which to get to know the Careers Officer.

The second annual review meeting proceeded with an undercurrent of irritation on the part of James's father. Three times he asked for an explanation of what was meant by various reports which at one point Mr Simpson referred to as 'gobbledy gook'. His father felt confused about the direction James should be taking. James had, according to his teacher, chosen to do a business studies course at the local secondary school (the special

school did not offer any vocational courses) but his probable placement in the careers office working as a clerical assistant was likely to be delayed because he was due to have a major operation. Meanwhile James had still not been seen by the Careers Service as the school was without a careers adviser.

Talking to Mr and Mrs Simpson later, both parents were keen for him to pursue a vocational qualification but on the other hand had no real ideas about what to advise him to do for the best. They both felt that he needed lots of experience of work to help him make up his mind about what he wanted to do.

In his statement to the annual review meeting in the following year James wrote, 'I am hoping to go to a college away from home so that I can do more things for myself and so that I can do a BTEC Business Studies Course.' But during the review Mrs Evans, James's teacher, revealed that she thought James's poor paper management and organisational skills would inhibit his ability to do such a course after all. It was now only five months before James was due to leave and his father, clearly irritated, questioned the wisdom of having let James follow a business studies programme in the first place if his organisational skills were apparently so poor, asking, 'Is he going down the wrong path with business studies? What other areas are there so that we can home in on his strengths?'

By the time James came to leave school the issue of which course to follow had still not been resolved.

Father        *We've never really resolved the issue as to whether, because he wasn't so good at organisational skills, he would be better to avoid them completely or to work on them.... That's one of the things I wanted to try and sort out with the teacher, but we never really got to that situation whether it was worth working on or whether to abandon the whole thing.*



Mother      *I think we went up to Barnwood College after that anyway and when they did their assessment they came up with IT.*

Father      *I think it's part of the business studies course anyway, and it honed down to be the best subject for him to study out of the business studies course and then he could always broaden out later.*

So, in the end James and his parents took a leap in the dark and followed the advice of his new college, contrary to the advice of the careers adviser who advocated a broad-based taster programme at a local college. But for James and his parents the overriding decision was to go to a residential college and decisions regarding courses and his longer-term future took second place.

#### *5. The lone decision-maker – 'alone in the world'*

By contrast to collective decision-making, some decisions were made in isolation and without any obvious consultation or discussion with anyone else. Stuart decided that the Careers Service and the local college had been so slow in organising a placement for him that he would rather go out to work and this is what he did without any real consultation. Maria's mother, Mrs Constandis, operated almost entirely alone in deciding whether Maria should remain in local provision or go to residential specialist provision. The social worker developed a locally based package while the school was hardly involved at all.

Maria was 17 when I first met her in 1996. She had Rhett's Syndrome and attended a local special school for children with severe learning difficulties. She lived in a private residential care home paid for by social services although every two weeks she would go back to the family home for a week to stay with her parents and younger brother. Eye pointing was her main means of communication although this was still at an early stage of development. Music and dancing seemed to give her great pleasure (she rocked excitedly when she saw a video of herself playing a drum) but she strongly disliked her regular physiotherapy sessions.

In November 1996, Mrs Constandis was already considering residential provision. She was concerned about the quality of local provision: staff morale was low, there were constant reorganisations and there was a lack of resources.

*'I don't trust what they say, put it this way, here, within the Borough, they have so many changes. All the time it is different, you go through accountants, social workers, policies have changed, there is no funds or they are suddenly cut off and your morale just zooms down.'*

She knew that the Rhett's Syndrome Association was opening a new four-place home and that, despite the distance, she would like Maria to go there. For her, the decision was becoming not whether to apply but when: 'The problem is how long do I wait, how much do I wait because you don't often get vacancies so it is a very big problem for me to decide what to do.'

Three months later, at the annual review, the issue of where Maria would go on leaving school was raised, a discussion that was almost entirely dominated by the social worker. The social worker said that it was difficult to get residential placements funded and went on to describe the various packages he had been exploring, each of which involved various combinations of local day centre and care home provision. He had already arranged for some of the care staff to visit the school to meet Maria. No further discussion of the residential option took place and later when I asked Mrs Constandis why she had not raised this as a possibility, she replied that as the placement she had in mind was not 'educational' she did not think it appropriate to do so.

That summer Mr and Mrs Constandis went away on holiday for six weeks leaving Maria in her group home. When her mother returned to pick her up in September she was shocked to find her thin and malnourished which her mother attributed to the care staff failing to feed her properly. Then, in the following January, Maria was badly scalded while having a shower and for Mrs Constandis this was the final straw. She had had the

application form for the residential college but now she filled it in and sent it off noting, 'Maybe it was a good thing because I thought she has got to get out of there, she has suffered too much.'

Maria was offered a place in the following May and left school a month later. Her teacher described feeling 'cheated, rushed and shocked'. The school was unaware that a residential home was on the agenda and knew only a month beforehand that Maria was going to leave. Her teacher described Mrs Constandis as feeling 'as if she's all alone in the world with Maria'. The school felt helpless and unable to comfort Maria whose distress increased as the time approached for her to leave school and which her teacher believed was not fully recognised by her mother. Her teacher believed that Maria did not want to leave home but went on, 'How far do you go in giving them real choices over major decisions...if you know that it isn't possible to give real choice?'

So, in this instance, the decision for Maria to go to a residential placement was almost entirely that of Maria's mother with even her father apparently playing no part in the discussions. In her desire to do the best for her daughter she acted alone, failing to recognise Maria's needs to be involved in the process as well as the potential contribution the school could make in supporting both herself and Maria in the transition from school. Clues as to why she acted in this way can be found in the way in which she construed herself in relation to Maria and her attitude towards the statutory services, whom she did not trust. She saw herself as having to fight for everything and she believed that it was she who would determine Maria's future. From Mrs Constandis' perspective there was simply no point in involving other people in any form of negotiation or support.

#### *6. Decisions that are made but not enacted*

This next account describes decisions that were made by an individual but were not realised. Kim wanted to join a youth club but her parents would not allow it. While this may appear to be a decision of a different order from those discussed so far, the wish to go to her local club was an important one for Kim. Kim lived at home with her parents

and younger twin brother and sister. She had moderate learning difficulties and a severe communication disorder, which she was gradually overcoming, and attended her local special school for children with moderate learning difficulties where she had been since she was five years of age. She had straight dark hair and plump features and when she became excited she would rock backwards and forwards, her words tumbling out colliding into one another. In September 1995 she had joined the Upper School but her parents did not feel that they were as closely involved as when Kim was lower down the school. They were very concerned about her travelling independently.

Kim's wish to go to a local youth club in the evenings emerged during our second interview in 1996 and resurfaced again when I met her parents later in the same year. Her mother argued that she would get over-tired and in any case she might be abused or attacked – they lived in such a rough area she said. Mr Doyle, Kim's father, pointed out, however, that they were both having a problem acknowledging that Kim was now a teenager.

Three months later, in February 1997, at Kim's annual review, the following exchange occurred as the meeting wound to a close.

- Deputy Head     *Mr and Mrs Doyle, is there anything else?*
- Kim                *Club. Don't go to club on Thursday.*
- Father            *Not really, we're only getting involved with our fears.*
- Mother            *Not really.*
- Kim                *Club – don't go to club on Thursday, only go in the summer.*
- Mother            *Groom Street Club runs on Thursdays. That's when I can help all my children. She keeps asking me. I said no to going to a club.*
- Deputy Head     *It's good that Mum can spend time with you.*

Here Kim attempts to use the forum of the review meeting to air her views. Even so, she had to repeat herself to make herself heard but no time was given to considering how her

aspiration to go to the youth club might be achieved. Her mother's anxieties about allowing Kim out, drove her to use the excuse she did. Nonplussed, the chair went along with Mrs Doyle's objections rather than giving time to exploring possibilities. Later in the meeting she suggested that Mrs Doyle should look into the possibility of Kim joining a local youth club which, in the circumstances, was something Kim's mother would be extremely reluctant to do.

A year passed by and the next review was held. The decision that Mrs Doyle should look into a club for Kim was not followed up at the meeting despite the fact that it appeared in the action plan and later her teacher said he had forgotten. Meanwhile Mrs Doyle said that now the timings at the club coincided with their mealtimes and so it was not convenient for Kim to attend. Were the teachers afraid of tackling what were the deep-rooted fears of Mrs Doyle, did the fact that it was Kim's action point give it lower status, was it so unusual for a student to make a request that it was outside the teacher's frame of reference or was it really just an oversight? The answer probably involves aspects of all of these.

So in the end, despite her attempts to assert herself, Kim did not go to the youth club and no one was prepared to intercede on her behalf. To ensure that something happens as the result of a personal decision it is either necessary to have some status and power within the decision-making group or to have the personal capacity to take action oneself, as in the case of Mrs Constandis. Kim had neither of these things and no one was prepared to act as an advocate on her behalf with her mother.

#### *7. Decisions made by default – a sense of destiny*

Some decisions were not conscious decisions at all but instead were drifted into on the tide of events. That Kylie would drop out of school was an overriding concern for Joyce Gray, the SENCO, from the first time we met when Kylie was in Year 9. I eventually met her mother, Mrs Long, when Kylie was 15 and she was also concerned that her daughter would repeat what she saw as the mistakes she had made as a teenager by dropping out of

school and getting married at 17. So there was a sense of foreboding on the part of her mother and her teacher about Kylie's destiny.

Kylie was a small and shy girl creating the impression of frailty. She had always had to take a lot of responsibility for her three younger brothers. Her mother, Mrs Long, was a single parent but Kylie saw her father quite regularly and went to spend weekends with him. For quite a long time the family had been homeless and lived in a women's refuge. More recently, however, they had moved into a house and her mother had a new partner, a local greengrocer with whom she was working when I first met Kylie. Because of family circumstances Kylie had changed schools quite frequently although she had been at Highfields Comprehensive for almost two years when I met her in Year 9. She earned a bit of extra money by babysitting for her next-door neighbour every afternoon after school.

Early conversations with Kylie revealed her desire to work with computers (although she thought her basic skills were not good enough), work with animals (though someone had told her the training was very long) or work with children. At our third meeting, by which time she had dropped out of school and was doing work experience at a nursery school, she thought that she needed to improve her English and maths to train as a nursery nurse.

A sociable and popular girl, Kylie seemed to have a number of friends with whom she remained in contact over the course of the three years I knew her and according to her teacher she was well liked by both pupils and teachers. Both her mother and teacher described her as strong-willed and determined.

Yet by the time she was 13 Kylie's pattern of attendance was already patchy. She had gone through a period of being a school refuser described by the SENCO as follows:

*'She has been going through a stage, it has stopped at the moment, whereby she has tendencies to becoming a school refuser. She was always being ill, and away a great deal*

*and that is simply because she can't access the lessons. She simply got fed up of it... If everything is too hard and too fast for you, you eventually wear out... Lots of family illness, so Kylie's attendance was interrupted. She gets depressed about not being able to work in school, and she gets stomach-aches and headaches. She is a worrier. Little problems become big problems.*

The SENCO believed that Kylie should have gone to a school for children with moderate learning difficulties, where the environment would have been more appropriate to her needs. When at school, Kylie appeared to spend a great deal of time working with the SENCO in a separate room. Joyce Gray said she tried to advise her colleagues on ways of modifying their teaching but that many teachers found it difficult to grasp Kylie's lack of understanding.

So why did she begin to drop out again? Joyce Gray believed that Kylie was avoiding failure in her GCSEs by not attending but was this the only reason? Kylie herself said that she found it difficult to go back to school if she missed a day, that school was noisy and in any case she knew lots of other children who didn't go to school. On the other hand she missed her friends. The situation with her three brothers had also deteriorated – her nine year-old brother had been expelled from school for stealing, he was extorting money from his mother and he had been caught stealing and begging. His five year-old brother was now copying him. The oldest boy who attended the same school as Kylie also went through periods of absenteeism and suspension, and had recently been suspended for not wearing his school uniform. He had, according to his sister, an 'attitude problem'. Mrs Long, who had split up from her boyfriend, was now having to work at the local pub and so Kylie was left in charge of her brothers in the evening.

The school had arranged a work placement for Kylie at a nursery for two days a week, combined with some home tutoring, which at her annual review in January 1998 (held at her home) was reported as going well. There was a sense throughout the meeting, however, of both her teacher and the careers adviser struggling to pull Kylie back into the

system, while she resisted. For example, the possibility of going on to college was explored and while her mother seemed enthusiastic about this idea, Kelly sat gazing out of the window throughout most of the discussion.

By March of the same year Kylie had been invited to extend her time at the nursery to almost full-time and everyone, including Joyce Gray, was delighted, but by June the whole arrangement had collapsed. A familiar pattern of behaviour had emerged as Kylie began well, started to arrive late and then went through extended periods of absenteeism. Her teacher speculated that her inability to get up in the morning was related to depression caused by the overwhelming difficulties at home. When the boys were younger, Kylie could cope with their behaviour, but, as they became older and more out of control, she withdrew into herself. The burden of responsibility as the eldest and only daughter had become too great for her to bear.

### **Commentary**

Like the decisions made by the young people in Hodkinson *et al.*'s study (1996) as well as those of Ball *et al.*'s (2000), what is striking about each of these examples of decision-making is that none of them was straightforward. Instead of the logical, bureaucratic and normative process which transition policies often assume, the process was messy and complex. Each illustration demonstrates the depth of human emotions that many of the participants experienced during the process including frustration, anger, fear, determination, relief, confusion and distress (Mellers *et al.*, 1998). They are a far cry from the systematic procedures outlined in the Code of Practice.

Not all the decisions can be said to have involved a conscious act of choice nor were these choices all followed by their enactment. In some cases there was no real choice to be made – there were very few alternatives. The examples of decision-making are arranged along a continuum of intentionality – they represent the different degrees of involvement and active participation of the different players in the process. Sometimes everyone appeared to be equally involved in the process, although more often than not



one or two people's views dominated as in the case of Andrew. Other decisions were drifted into, or made by default like those concerning Kylie or Malcolm, while in other cases such as Costas' parents' decision to let him stay at school, there was a decision made to do nothing and maintain the status quo.

Power emerged as an important factor in the process – the power of a parent over a child, father over mother or the school over parents. It was clear that some individuals were accorded higher status in the decision-making process than others. For example, parents' views were more likely to be listened to than those of pupils. Some types of decisions were also accorded greater priority – Kim's wish to attend the youth club was not seen as important as the decision over whether she should travel independently. Yet the two things were inextricably linked. Was this to do with Kim's place in the pecking order or was it to do with the nature of her concern? Probably both. James's aspiration to join the police force was dismissed as unrealistic by his mother and Mrs Demetrios' suggestion about exploring Marks and Spencer's training programmes was never given any serious consideration.

Access to information was another important factor in determining the relative power of individuals within the process, a point also made by Wilkinson (2000). There were examples where information was withheld by parents and teachers from children (Andrew), teachers from parents (Mr and Mrs Simpson) or parents from teachers (Mrs Constandis). Like the parents in Wilkinson's study, Constandis derived her information, and consequently her power, from belonging to a voluntary organisation, as well as through her membership of various local committees. Even though some of the parents knew of local voluntary associations they did not make use of them. More often than not they relied on friends, family and other parents for information, a point to which I will return in Chapter 6.

There were also differences between the levels of personal agency that individuals exercised within the process, as well as the extent to which they were allowed to exercise

it. Nasreen's attempts to make the best of her situation contrasts sharply with Kylie's response where she seemed to sink deeper into depression. Kim tried to assert herself but failed because others did not allow her voice to be heard.

So far, all of the factors I have identified could play a part in the decision-making processes engaged in by many young people and their families – their status; the status of their opinions; access to information; their know-how; their knowledge of the system; their personal determination. An additional factor, which played an important part in four of the young people's lives, was their medical needs. They either needed unexpected medical treatment or an aspect of their physical care became a cause for concern. The extent to which individuals' cognitive impairments influenced the course of events is harder to judge at this point and is a factor to which I will return.

Another distinguishing feature of the decision-making process is the formality of the procedures in which young people with statements of special educational needs, their families and professionals are all expected to engage with from the age of 13 onwards about what the pupil will do when they leave school. Whereas the decision-making process is largely, though not entirely, a private process for everyone else, pupils with special educational needs are subject to more regular, official scrutiny and debate than any other young person. The extent to which these formal procedures actually support the process is open to question and again something to which I will return. What is important to note here is the extent to which more opportunities exist for these pupils and their families to be subject to external pressures and assumptions than for many of their non-disabled peers.

However, underlying each of these stories was a complex interaction of factors and as Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) put it, 'The decision-making was context related, and could not be separated from the family background, culture and life histories of the pupils' (p.33). It is to a closer examination of this context that I now turn.

## Chapter 5

### The Influences of and on the Self

#### Introduction

In Chapter 2, I discussed the tension between individualistic and structuralist explanations of career learning. Most careers guidance policies issued by central government have been based on an individualistic approach stemming from the belief that individuals choose their own career paths, having considered a range of options. However, in one of the most recent policy initiatives, structural barriers to young people's self-realisation have been acknowledged, as when in a speech the Minister for Lifelong Learning, Malcolm Wicks (2000) noted that, 'changes in relation to social, family and labour market structures mean that young people face new risks and challenges' (p.2). The debate therefore centres on the degree to which one approach is emphasised more than another. Willis, in his seminal work of 1977, argued that class and the structures of society into which we are born determine career paths. Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) and Ball *et al.* (2000) suggest, however, that post-school choices are influenced by the interaction of the individual *and* society in a complex and reflexive process, concluding that many young people do make conscious choices about their lives and, as a result, break free of predictable or conventional patterns and norms.

To what extent are the issues the same for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities? In 1992, Riddell, like Hodkinson and Ball, argued that we need to develop theories which embrace both structure and agency when trying to understand more about the post-school destinations of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. She later concluded (Riddell *et al.*, 1999) that people with learning difficulties, despite having the capacity to make choices, are still not accorded the right to do so. Instead they are allocated a restricted range of services so that they become what Riddell *et al.* refer to as 'captured customers' (p.445).

This chapter explores what influence, if any, the young people in this study exercised over the decisions made about their lives and how they were influenced in the formulation of these decisions. What influence they had partly stems from themselves and their identities – how they saw themselves and who they saw themselves becoming. Their identities were influenced by a further set of factors, which I have tried to untangle without reducing the complexity and interconnectedness of many of the strands of influence. At the back of my mind the question remained – how different and how similar were the factors that governed the lives of these young people as opposed to those of others?

In thinking and talking about themselves and their future lives, the young people in my study were engaged in a number of different processes, which can be summarised as expressing, seeking and asserting their identities. In other words they were, as Brannen (1996) describes, engaged not so much ‘in being but in becoming’ (p.114). The question then follows, how far did others acknowledge this to be the case? To what extent were they enabled to escape from childhood and become adolescents?

Of course, to be conscious of self in this way and to be able to express thoughts and ideas demands a high level of self-awareness on the part of individuals as well as sophisticated communication skills which many of the students in this study did not possess. However, by listening carefully to their language, through observing them and through listening to the accounts of their parents and teachers I tried to build up a picture of each student. Sometimes they talked about themselves, their likes and dislikes; that is, they were *expressing their identity*. They also talked about who they wanted to become, *seeking an identity*, and the factors that would either support or inhibit them in this process. These factors helped to shape and structure what have been variously termed their ‘zone of possibilities’ (Gottfredson, 1981), their ‘possible and impossible selves’ (Oyserman & Markus, 1990), or their ‘horizons for action’ (Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). Each of these terms suggest a process of exploration, considering, refining or discarding possibilities or, as one of the students in this study described it, ‘knowing the field’. Finally, like the people with learning difficulties in Riddell *et al.*’s (1999) research, many of the young people in this study had decided what they wanted, they had made choices but the extent to which they were allowed to influence processes and assert their preferences often lay in the gift of others. On

the scale of things the young people in this study were often relatively powerless and sometimes sought alternative ways to *assert their identity*.

These three dimensions of identity are not separate parts of the process of growing up but merge and interact with each other and are influenced by a complex interplay of other factors. For example, when it came to making up his mind about which college to go to Andrew was clear that both the choice of course and the nature of the other students were important to him. The following interview was conducted through an interpreter:

Int.        *What did you think about Brayborough College and John Brown College (both sector colleges)?*

Andrew    *Brayborough had a very small electrical place, the course was small. At John Brown the electrical course was OK but I would be the only deaf person there and I didn't want that.*

Int.        *So, in deciding which college to go to, what is the most important thing for you?*

Andrew    *The course itself.*

Int.        *That is the most important consideration and then next the other students.*

Andrew    *I wouldn't feel comfortable if I was just **on my own** (my emphasis) so it is important to have both.*

Here Andrew is emphasising that he wants to be with other deaf students and that he would feel alone without them (expressing identity). However, with an eye on the future, he also wanted to go to a college where he would have the opportunity to mix with hearing people to increase his confidence because his aspiration was to get a job as an electrician in open employment (seeking identity). This is what he wrote:

*'If I go to college for deaf only, then get job in future and I will not feel confidence mixed with hearing, if I go to mixed deaf and hearing college I will learn more what they are like. Also I will feel confidence in job in the future.'*

He was concerned to 'look around and see where the best college for me is' and then later, when he had completed his visits and made up his mind, he thought that his next

annual review would be boring as he had already decided what he wanted to do and saw no reason for further discussion (asserting identity). Ball *et al.* (2000) aptly summarise this relationship between a young person's identity and the selection of their FE college: 'Choosing a college is in some respects like choosing a way of representing yourself' (p.30). Here Andrew is thinking of himself not only as a member of a distinctive deaf community, but also of himself in the future and who he would like to become straddling the worlds of deaf and hearing, working in open employment as an electrician in the hearing world, and his choice of college was influenced by this desire.

### **Influences on identity**

The influences on some or all of the young people which subsequently influenced the decision-making processes included their families; the extent to which their aspirations, strengths and interests were recognised by others including their curricular experiences; the emphasis given to their academic course or the choice of institution; their gender and ethnicity; their wish to be accorded adolescent or adult status; their wider friendship networks or lack of them. While these influences are in general no different from those that affect all other young people, the influence of their disabilities and/or learning difficulties was a constant theme which threaded its way through most conversations and seemed to impact on and shape most of what happened and the responses to those events. For that reason I have not identified the pupils' special educational needs as a distinctive influence.

### *Families*

Foskett and Hesketh's (1997) survey of approximately 1,300 pupils showed that while only 9% of young people said that their parents were the most important influence on their choice of post-school institution, 40% believed them to have had a general underlying influence. This research relied on young people as the sole judge of family influence which, while not necessarily flawed, may not give an entirely accurate picture. Other studies such as that by Morrow and Richards (1996) have argued that families have a far greater impact on young people, both in terms of the level of economic and practical support offered as well as the continuous socialisation processes in which families are engaged.

There are numerous examples in this study of how families influenced their children and the choices that were made. Some family members acted as role models illustrated by Andrew's wish to become an electrician like his father or Costas' desire to have a girlfriend like his older brother. Families acted as sources of information such as Nasreen's older sister's advice on how to apply for university or through providing links into employment such as Malcolm's part-time job at his uncle's workplace. The family was also the means by which young people were introduced into their cultures and traditions which sometimes, as in Nasreen's case, lead to feelings of fear and confusion about who they were and what their future entailed.

Loss of what he saw as his real family drove Gavin to re-establish links with his birth father who his foster mother, Mrs MacBride believed was dealing in drugs. Once Gavin had found his father he began to treat him as a role model much to his foster mother's concern. This is how Gavin described relationships with his foster family and his desire to spend more time with his father:

Gavin *I don't listen to them anymore. They didn't want me to have my ear pierced but I did anyway. I'm allowed to go and see my Dad once a month but I go more often than that. When I'm 18 I'm going to go and live with my Dad.*

Int. *What does he do?*

Gavin *Don't know but he's always got lots of money.*

His dream, which he described when I first met him, was to have a family – to get married, have two children and keep a dog and a snake. He was not allowed to keep pets at his foster home although at the time he had said that he loved animals and wanted to work with them. On the second occasion that we met, a year later, I asked him whether he still wished to work with animals and he laughed:

Gavin *Well, I would like to work in a zoo but not that much.*

Int. *Could you do work experience with animals?*

Gavin *I want to go to the RSPCA but I don't know where to go to find out, I can't be bothered.*

Then, pointing to the Yellow Pages, he said:

*The number's in there.*

Int. *Have you ever talked to anyone about this?*

Gavin *No! Anyway the training's long.*

Int. *How do you know?*

Gavin *I was watching a TV programme.*

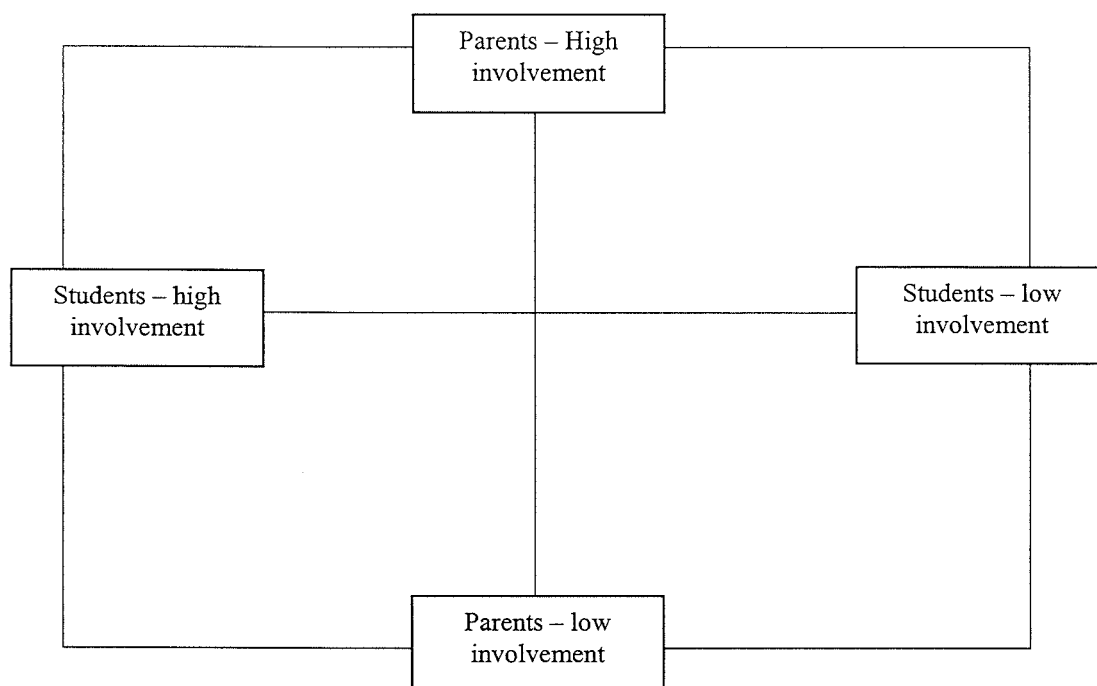
Gavin had constructed his future self through what he did not have but secretly longed for. He did not have the family support systems and structures to foster his interests, to help him build on these and support him in exploring his options and possibilities. Nor, seemingly, were these available to him outside the home.

Gavin eventually had to leave his foster home for stealing and was placed with another family but each day he went back to Mrs MacBride for his meals and she continued to keep his room ready for him in case he ever returned. Then he was excluded from school. He was reported to be living with squatters and I eventually lost touch with him despite efforts to contact him through Social Services and his next school.

The main difference in parental influence on decision-making processes and post-school destinations of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities appears to be one of degree rather than substance and concerns the extent to which parents were directly involved in deciding what is going to happen. Yet like all families, parents and their children varied in their relative degrees of active involvement, summarised in Figure 1.



**Figure 5:1 Degrees of involvement in the decision-making process**



In seeking an explanation for these variations in degrees of involvement, Brannen's (1996) analysis of the relationship between parents and adolescent children is helpful. Brannen's study explored how parents construct adolescence and how these constructions influenced their relationships with their children, including the degree of autonomy that they ascribe to their offspring. Parents' ideas were governed by a range of other factors including both cultural and gender-related issues. In the present study, the child's disability clearly played a powerful and in some instances all-consuming role in constructing parental views about their child's adolescence and their future lives. Disability and other factors that influenced parental responses are explored in greater depth in the next chapter but what concerns us here is the extent to which the role of the family and, more particularly, parents was so powerful that the young person's identity and consequently their ideas were subsumed by those of their parents. Consequently, in families where there was a high degree of involvement by parents but low autonomy ascribed to the individual young person it was sometimes almost impossible to distinguish between the views of the parents and those of their child. This was so in the case of Sandra, who was only marginally involved throughout the whole process.

Sandra lived at home with her parents, Mr and Mrs Harding, and her older brother. Her mother and brother both worked for the same insurance company and her father was unemployed. She attended a special school for children with physical disabilities on a daily basis although she was beginning to stay over at school on one night a week. Sandra's best friend Amber lived nearby and they went out together to the nearby swimming pool and bowling alley. The whole family were involved in caring for Sandra including grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

In Sandra's mind leaving school and going to college was synonymous with leaving her home and family, something she did not want to do. At our first meeting, when she was 15, she told me about her fears:

Int.        *Is there anything that you worry about when you think about leaving school?*

Sandra    *I'll miss my Mum and Dad*

Int.        *Will you? Where will you go when you leave school then?*

Sandra    *To college.*

Int.        *Does that mean you'll have to go away from your Mum and Dad?*

Sandra    *But I'll still miss them.*

Int.        *Have you been to a college?*

Sandra    *No.*

Int.        *What do you think it's like? What do you think you do there, do you know?*

Sandra    *No.*

Int.        *Who told you about it?*

Sandra    *My mum, my dad and my brother.*

Int.        *They all told you about it, did they? What did they say?*

Sandra    *They all... Sandra, we're gonna miss you.*

In trying to understand more about Sandra's perspective I turned to her parents and teachers and here there were marked differences in how they perceived her needs and responses. For her mother there was a conflict between treating Sandra as a dependent child for whom she had to provide constant care and protection and as an adolescent, allowing her to assert her own identity which she felt she ought to be doing. That she saw her daughter very much as a child was discernible through how she chose to

describe her: 'a smashing little girl'; 'a good little soul'; 'a nervous child'; 'a very innocent little girl'. Yet her mother felt that others expected her to afford Sandra more autonomy:

*'I don't want it to be that I am selfish saying, "No, she can't do that", because if she was that sort of child and she was more independent and she wanted to do that – I want to go to college and I want to do this – you know it would be a bit of a heartbreak for us, but we would let her go, we wouldn't hold her back. As it is I feel it won't do her much good... I hope you don't think we are being selfish. In a way she should be more independent and she's not going to be independent if we don't let her go. But I think she is getting quite independent in the school that she is at. She copes well with that... I hope she gets independent. I don't want to stifle her. She's not that child who has got that knowledge so that she can go out on her own. You know you do see people in wheelchairs and they can go out on their own. She could never do that.'*

Her parents concern for her safety meant that they were not keen for her to go away to a residential college but her mother's views on the alternatives did not coincide with those of her father, for while Mrs Harding wanted Sandra to go to specialist local provision, her father wanted her to stay at home. Mr Harding seemed keen to try to manage everything themselves and, for example, did not want Mrs Harding to join a local parents support group. Her husband's wish to be entirely self-sufficient created a dilemma for his wife. She did not, as she put it, want to appear 'mean' but she actually valued the time she had to herself to get on with chores while Sandra stayed overnight at school. The thought of having Sandra at home all the time concerned her and she also felt it was better for her daughter to spend some time with her peer group. She said:

*'I know that when she's there (at school) she's going to be out doing something with the crowd. I think, well, she should be out and if she can stay at college that would be very nice for me whereas Chris wants her here every minute of the day. He doesn't have to do what women have to do and I find that when I come home from work – I know he will have done all the cooking and the shopping and hoovered round – but there's still loads to do.'*

But when I saw Sandra later the same year she said that she was going to stay at home.

Int.        *Where will you go when you leave school then?*

Sandra    *I will go home.*

Int.        *You will go home?*

Sandra    *And stay with my Mum and Dad.*

Int.        *You won't go anywhere else? You aren't going to college?*

Sandra    *Am having a college at home.*

Not only did she want to stay at home but she aspired to follow in her father and brother's footsteps and go off to the local pub for a 'quiet drink' with her mother. Her world was circumscribed by her family and its activities.

In contrast, both her teachers believed that Sandra was over-dependent on her parents and that the residential option would be preferable for her because she needed some time away from home to increase her independence. One teacher regarded her parents' ideas of residential colleges as 'Dickensian'. It probably was the case that a culture of interdependence had developed within the family, arguably driven more by her father's attitudes than her mother's, who in spite of her personal dilemmas, wanted Sandra to build a life outside the home. Whereas Gavin had searched for his family to find an identity, Sandra's identity was so closely bound up with that of her family and theirs with hers, that it seemed impossible to separate them.

In summary, the majority of parents generally exercised a very high degree of influence on their children and had a direct involvement in the decision-making processes in some cases such as Maria, Sandra and Costas to the exclusion of their children. The extent to which they in turn were listened to or helped to be part of the formal decision-making processes is something to which I will return.

#### *Aspirations, strengths and interests – Possible and impossible selves?*

One of the aims of careers education programmes is to help young people articulate their aspirations and explore their own strengths and interests. Most of the young

people had dreams and ambitions, which they could describe and which ranged from being famous, to having a girlfriend, or working with children.

Sometimes how they saw themselves and who they wanted to become was challenged by the nature of their disability. James saw himself as a very active and sociable person and his favourite subjects at school were science, art, swimming and PE. As noted earlier his ambition had been to become a policeman because of the opportunities it presented to be both active and sociable. He described his initial upset at having to come to terms with the fact that such a job would be beyond his capacity. His teacher thought James was unrealistic in his ambition to join the police force and seemed unaware of the personal struggles he had experienced in coming to terms with his physical disability and its impact on his self-image and consequently who he wanted to become. Nevertheless she was trying to encourage him to think more laterally about trying to get a civilian post in the police. He still longed to be able to walk and run like other people.

*'...as I have grown up, I have got more used to being in a wheelchair but I still feel that I would like to get out of this and start walking on my own. Get out of these (callipers) and run off but that is not going to be possible either... When I was quite young I found that really tough to come to terms with but now I am just getting on with it because I know that I won't ever do what I want because of this wheelchair...'*

In this instance it was James's disability that was the overriding factor in causing him to have to rethink his ideas.

Sometimes despite youngsters demonstrating a real aptitude or interest in a particular subject area this seemed to get lost in other considerations. An extract from Gavin's annual review serves as a demonstration.

Educational Psychologist	<i>What about drama? You've got an excellent report for drama. Are you not going to do GCSE drama, Gavin?</i>
Gavin	<i>No.</i>
Teacher	<i>With the GNVQ it's a double option.</i>

- Chair *Are there any other points anyone wants to raise?...*  
*(reading the transition report) Question: Does the young*  
*person have views about what they want to do after 16?*
- Gavin *Work.*
- Chair *Not go to college?*
- Gavin *Go to college.*
- Chair *What are you going to do at college? Business Studies,*  
*perhaps?*

The subject of drama was not returned to in the meeting but when the meeting was over the Educational Psychologist raised the topic again, saying that it seemed a shame that Gavin was not able to build on a subject at which he obviously shone. According to his teacher, however, the pressures on the timetable meant that he could not be released from any of his GNVQ classes to do a GCSE. At no point was his wish to work with animals discussed.

It seems, in this instance, that logistical problems prevented Gavin from developing what appeared to be a talent and no time was spent during the meeting exploring how these problems might be overcome.

Sometimes there was a tension between what professionals, including teachers or careers officers, assumed would be the best, or in most instances the only, route for a pupil to take and the pupils' expressed interests. These assumptions were generally based on custom and practice and what other young people from that particular school had done, either progressing on to a particular residential or local college or training scheme. In reality of course, there was often very little real choice available. As Malcolm's teacher put it, 'You can only choose what is there. Things aren't in place for people like Malcolm. I mean you have a very limited choice.'

Nevertheless, it may have been possible to take account of students' individual aspirations more than was apparently the case. For example, Malcolm did have an idea about what he wanted to do and he knew that his inability to read, including maps, could constitute a major stumbling block. However, at no time was his aspiration to become a van driver's mate ever discussed although various reports

alluded to his enjoyment of manual work and his wish to improve his reading. Here then the block appeared to be the capacity to take Malcolm's aspirations seriously and to explore how, within the constraints of limited options, his aspirations could have contributed in equal measure to the formulation of his transition plan. As already described, he went ahead and dropped out of school anyway but perhaps the fact that both his father and the school were apparently not listening to him combined to cause his frustration to boil over.

Based on these three rather gloomy vignettes it would be fair to conclude that a student's own strengths and interests often played very little part in decisions made about curriculum options and post-school placements although there were exceptions as in the cases of both Andrew and Nasreen. The difference seemed to lie in the extent to which individual young people had the capacity to assert their own views and ideas or were supported in doing so. All of them were able to communicate their preferences, such as Maria's love of music, amply demonstrated when she watched a video of herself during her transition planning meeting, or Sandra's wish to go to the pub with her mother. Yet most of the students were dependent on others not only to help them realise their ambitions but also, sometimes, to find ways of acknowledging them as having interests and aspirations in the first place. This in turn affected the extent to which their personal interests and ambitions influenced decisions.

### *Course or institution?*

A key question I set out to answer through this study was how a young person's disability and/or learning difficulty interacted with other influences in the decision-making process. One of the significant dilemmas faced by four of the students was whether they chose a college on the basis of the type of courses on offer or the type of institution and, more specifically, whether it was a specialist residential college for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or a mainstream college.

The impact of disability on how young disabled people construe themselves has been the subject of a number of recent studies including Allan (1999) and Rusteimer (2000). Both of these studies concluded that young people respond to and deal with their disabilities in different ways and the young people in my study were no exception. It was also clear that for some students being with other disabled people

was a major factor in making their post-school choices but so was the course they wanted to follow. David, James, Nasreen and Andrew all faced this dilemma.

Each of these four saw themselves as different from non-disabled people and as part of a distinct other group: 'I need a peer group of my own thought (sic)' (Nasreen); 'I want a job with other deaf and not with hearing' (David); 'I wouldn't feel comfortable if I was just on my own (in a mainstream college)' (Andrew). But whereas David, Nasreen and Andrew seemed comfortable with themselves, James was distressed by other people's attitudes to his disability.

James *When I am out in the streets with my Mum and Dad I feel like I am an alien and that I shouldn't be there, I should be at home.*

Int. *What makes you feel that?*

James *Because when I am going down the street or going in the shopping centre with my Mum and Dad and my family, people just come past us and stare at us, it just gets so annoying. I mean sometimes it has even stopped me from going out because I haven't liked the feeling that people stare at me. Like, why are they staring at me? Is anything wrong with me? I'm only in a wheelchair and I mean they could be in a wheelchair one day with arthritis or their hip joints playing up or something, you know, and then they will be stared at.*

Int. *Do you feel you notice it more now than when you were younger?*

James *Yes... Change in me, I suppose, I have become more aware of what is around me as I am older.*

Each of them had also spent some time in mainstream schools as part of joint programmes between their special and mainstream schools. Neither James nor Nasreen had enjoyed the experience and both described the social isolation they had experienced. James said:

*'They don't get to see what we are like; they just get to see us for say an hour or two hours so they don't get used to us. Maybe if they came here for a day or so each week that would be better, they could work here and see how we find it. Just see us a little*



*better and get on with us a little bit more. When we go we just work in a small little group...'*

Whether her experience in a mainstream school had the effect on Nasreen she claimed is difficult to say but she was adamant that she did not want to go to a college where there was any kind of integration programme. She felt that she would only get the kind of teaching she wanted in a specialist setting. She wanted to optimise her chances of getting into university by getting the best teaching she could. For her, then, segregated provision meant the best provision as well as the chance to be with others who shared her experience of being blind and who were on, what she described as, 'the same academic level'.

For Andrew, maintaining the balance between type of course and peer group was a difficult one. When asked to say which he saw as most important in his choice he said both, as described earlier. He wanted the right course but he also wanted to be with other deaf and hearing-impaired students as well as hearing students. However, although David said the course was important (he wanted to do drama) he said being with other deaf students was more important. James also preferred to go away from home and said he thought the challenge of living away from home would make him more independent although he too wanted to go to a college where there were opportunities to mix with non-disabled students. Like other non-disabled young people, for James the wider experience of living away from home was a more important consideration than his academic programme.

Debates over which colleges to go to among parents and teachers, local or residential, tended to favour the residential option either implicitly or explicitly for reasons that I will return to. At this point however, it is worth noting, with the exception of Mr and Mrs Simpson, that only the four students themselves talked about the nature of the courses on offer as an equally important factor in their choice of college, suggesting that for others in the 'decision-making unit' the students' disability and possible care needs were of greater significance.

### *Gender and ethnicity*

As discussed in Chapter 2, for some time now the extent to which gender and ethnicity determine career path (as opposed to class) has been an ongoing debate in the career learning literature. In this study, gender did appear to play some part in the attitudes and consequently the expectations placed on the young people. For example, it is worth speculating that had Kylie been a boy it is doubtful whether she would have had to take so much responsibility for her younger siblings. Had James been a girl, perhaps his parents would not have stressed the need for him to be as independent as possible, which in turn influenced his commitment to going away to college. And if Sandra had been male, then perhaps her parents would not have felt the same overwhelming need to protect her.

However, of all the young people I met it was Nasreen who best encapsulated the complex interplay of gender, culture and disability in shaping her identity and her horizons for action. Her concern about marriage threaded its way through most of our conversations, acting as a recurrent theme. She recalled in her childhood overhearing a conversation between her father and a doctor about her chances of marriage.

*'When I was younger my dad was talking to the doctor and I was only about eight at the time and I can't remember much but he was talking about it because he was talking about marriage and me and asking whether I could get married so basically I don't know what is in store for me.'*

Although she aspired to go to university and then to become a psychologist she saw her family's wish for her to marry as the biggest single obstacle to achieving her ideal lifestyle which was to, 'Live somewhere in quite a big house, in quite a green area where I have access to the city, access to greenery'.

The pressures on her to marry came not only from her family but from her wider community. Furthermore, once she married she would be expected to have a child. In her conversation she distinguished between religious traditions and cultural expectations.

*'For example, with children, the woman is the one who is expected to take care of them, personally I scorn that fact, for example if you are a young mother and you have just got married and had a child, you are the one expected to look after it and give up your job. The husband would not be expected to look after the child, oh no, but personally I think that is ridiculous. Everybody has their own opinions and partly Western influence as well... People have never said this outright which is that a woman is expected to have a baby as soon as she gets married. These are the expectations, these are not the religious expectations, these are the cultural expectations. I mean, my family and a lot of families get religion mixed up with cultures, they say oh, no you can't do this or you can't do that ... I suppose I am going to have a battle with my parents about that. Also the idea that... the parents are the ones who make the decisions. In my culture the child is not supposed to have any say and personally I cannot stand that because half of what my Dad says is wrong. He likes to think that the family is good and you will do this because of the good of the family.'*

She expressed her fear not only of marriage but of giving birth to a child with congenital blindness, knowing that there were already five members of her family with this inherited condition. She thought that her parents did not understand the links between inter-marriage and glaucoma. The possibility of having an operation to restore her sight also filled her with alarm, believing that if successful this would increase her chances of marriage. She said, 'I am used to living on my own, I have never had sight, so I never know what I have missed and I am almost going to have to start from the beginning, learning what... marriage I mean.'

So Nasreen struggled with a number of conflicting pressures on her: her blindness; the cultural expectation that she would marry and have children; the fear of having children with glaucoma; and her own career aspirations. However, she was also rather skilled at using her gender and cultural expectations to achieve her goals. Her father had wanted her to go to a college close to home which did not have a strong academic tradition and where the sleeping accommodation was mixed. At Nasreen's preferred college, not only did boys and girls sleep in separate accommodation, there were locks on the doors and she used this argument with her parents to try to convince them

to let her go to the college of her choice. With some help from her teachers, she eventually succeeded.

*Adolescence and adult status – ‘One of the lads’*

Having a job remains one of the most powerful indicators of adult status in our society and for Malcolm and Stuart this was their dream, to be, as Malcolm put it, ‘with the lads’. Stuart in particular was not happy at school and despite his teachers’ best efforts he was not keen to go on to college when he left school at 16. While Malcolm at first appeared reasonably content at school, his dissatisfaction grew and this, combined with his father’s refusal to let him travel to school independently, caused him to want to leave school and get a job as a van driver’s mate. In many ways the motivations behind their respective decisions to leave school were similar, in that they both wanted the status of a job, but for Stuart it was perhaps to escape the experience of school failure that pushed him in this direction whereas, for Malcolm, it was possibly a way of demonstrating his adulthood to his father.

According to his parents, Stuart had always had some form of job since he was 12 years old. Each Saturday he went to the market and helped out on various stalls so he had a good idea about what work entailed. He had got the job himself by asking around. His father believed that he was the type of boy who would learn more when he left school than while he was there, while his mother described him as ‘a very good kid really. Never causes trouble, never gets into fights.’ This view of Stuart contrasted sharply with that of his comprehensive school’s SENCO Mrs Gray who described him as ‘immature and light-fingered’ but a ‘softie’. He was often in trouble with other teachers over his behaviour, and she felt Stuart could not face up to his problems. She thought that he should go to college when he left school. However, Stuart did appear to have a good understanding of his difficulties, stating during our first discussion that he thought he needed to work harder at school but that his behaviour could get in the way of his succeeding at school and also in getting a job. He thought he might like to become a carpenter.

When he was in Year 10 he was given a statement of special educational needs because of his behaviour problems and he began to receive more one-to-one support from a volunteer tutor. He had begun bullying other children using his size to threaten

them but, by his final year at school, Mrs Gray said that his bullying had stopped but he had also stopped working. For his last two terms at school he joined a link scheme at the local college for two days a week on what was called a 'skills match' – pupils tried out different courses to see which best matched their aptitudes and interests. Mrs Gray thought he would then probably do a year of basic skills and woodwork before going on to a youth training scheme. But things did not turn out this way and Stuart takes up the story:

*'Well, I got messed around so many times at college, I just got fed up with it so I didn't go for it in the end, then I went for a trainee job at Mitsubishi up Mill Lane. I didn't get a reply from there so I went to Careers and they told me about the warehouse job so I went for that and I got it.'*

From being monosyllabic Stuart had changed into an articulate and self-confident young man in the space of a few months. He was full of plans for the future as well:

*'They said they would give me driving lessons, fork lift licence and HGV licence in the next few years if I stayed with them... If I get my lorry driving licence, you have to stay on there for a year before you can leave because if you leave straight away you have got to pay for the licence. After I have done the year I might leave, I am not sure yet, and go for another company and get better money.'*

For Stuart it seemed as if the transition from school to work was a liberation – no longer confronted every day with things he could not do, he was now in an environment he understood and felt comfortable in. He had joined the world of work and he was already planning his next move.

Malcolm too helped out with various jobs. Sometimes he helped deliver chairs and tables with his uncle, at other times he helped a neighbour work on his car around the corner from his home. Although his aim was to be a van driver's mate he was concerned about his inability to read the maps and road signs. Whether or not Malcolm should leave school and get a job was an ongoing debate over the course of the three years that I knew Malcolm and his family. His mother believed he would be bored but felt that if he could get a job then she would be happy but the school said

that until he learned to use public transport there was little point in contemplating trying to get employment. However, his father consistently refused to let Malcolm travel alone. Meanwhile Malcolm was becoming more and more difficult at home. Relationships with his younger and much more able brother were strained and Malcolm would sometimes fly into uncontrollable rages. Yet, when Malcolm was helping out with jobs his father noted: 'He (the garage owner) says he's really good company, and he chats away and he doesn't ask silly questions, he asks the right questions.'

Malcolm continued to go to school but gradually his attendance dropped off and by his review in March 1998 he said he wanted to leave. This was a tense meeting attended by his mother but not his father. The agenda swung back and forth between whether Malcolm should leave school and whether he should start travelling independently. It was clear that everyone present at the meeting wanted him to start travelling to school by himself including Malcolm who every now and then would agree vehemently about his ability to be able to do so. Here is an example of one such exchange.

Mrs Lewis *I'm not the problem, it's his Dad. He can't let him walk to school. He's worried about him. He wraps them up in cotton wool to make him feel better.*

Teacher *Malcolm's probably not being stretched, this is the problem.*

Chair *What will happen when Malcolm's 40?*

Malcolm *Yeah!*

The meeting agreed a plan of action for travelling to school but Malcolm looked displeased when his teacher suggested further work experience placements. He said he would rather leave and get a job.

He had also started to have a drink after work with the men he worked with but his parents disapproved believing that he could become a source of fun. So now, not only did his father not allow him to travel around on his own, he disapproved of him having a drink with his workmates even though by this time Malcolm was almost 18 years old. It was hardly surprising that Malcolm was becoming angry and violent.

Soon after this meeting Malcolm stopped going to school and then college so that in the end he was just going to his work experience. Then that stopped and by July of the same year he was doing a bit of part-time work with his uncle again.

His father said he thought that Malcolm had left school because he felt ‘grown up’ so it was surprising that his father did not more actively acknowledge Malcolm’s need to be seen as a young adult and allow him more freedom. Unlike the rest of the family, who seemed to ignore their father’s anxieties, Malcolm did not have the ability to express his frustrations verbally so he rebelled in the only way he knew and just stopped going to school. Asked about what he liked about work he said:

*‘I have a laugh with them (the other men). Have a laugh and a joke with them. They are alright.’*

At work with these men he felt accepted and valued and, like Stuart, he felt part of the working world and hence an adult.

### *Friends*

What part did friendships play in influencing the preferences of students? Like many young people who go to special schools, all nine young people at special schools in this study appeared to have few or no friends in their local neighbourhoods. This was a cause for concern particularly for some parents. David’s father, Bill Francis, described the dilemma facing him as the father of a deaf child:

Int. *Does he have friends in the local community?*

Bill *No, no... No one can sign. No, that is the problem. You see when we moved here, we moved here for him to go to that school but we didn’t really realise that a lot of the children are boarding there, we thought they lived round in the local area. So we moved here to get him a good social life, but it didn’t work out. It got him the school, but he got no social life at all.*

This concern over David’s social isolation at home had prompted Bill Francis to try to persuade the local authority and the school to let David become a weekly boarder. At

first the school were reluctant, believing that David's behaviour could be influenced by some of the other pupils who boarded during the week. Mr Francis was adamant, however, that being able to 'mess about' with one's peers was part of growing up: 'He may be silly, but they are silly anyway, so why can't he be silly with people who are, you know, his own peer group.' In the end the school relented although David was subsequently suspended twice for bad behaviour in the hostel during his final year at school. He also became violent and aggressive with his father although whether these two things were connected was not clear. For Andrew, David, Nasreen and James this concern about social isolation seems to have been one of the contributory factors in their preference for a residential placement. On the other hand, the fact that Sandra had friends in the local community was one of the reasons that Mrs Harding wanted her to remain living at home. So friendship and social networks were recognised as important by some parents but not all.

Costas, Malcolm and Kim had each tried to build a network of friends but they were not supported in doing so. Kim had attempted to widen her social network by joining a youth club but these attempts as described earlier were blocked by her mother, while Costas had been forbidden to give the family telephone number to any of his friends at school. Malcolm had found a group of men at his uncle's work he liked to be with but aside from this group he had no friends of his own age.

What of the young people who went to community schools? All three of them had friends both at school and in their home neighbourhoods who they spent time with. For instance, Kylie gave as one reason for dropping out of school knowing other people who did the same thing although she did not want her friend to work at the same work placement as herself because it would feel too much like school. Of the two friends Stuart mentioned one had gone to college while another had got a job. Gavin was described by his foster mother as having 'loads of friends' and Gavin himself thought that his friends would have the most influence on whether he stayed or left school at 16. However, his support teacher was concerned that he could fall in with a 'bad crowd'.

It could be argued that it was fear of lack of friendships rather than friendships per se that was a more important influence on the choice of post-school destinations for a



number of these young people. The failure of their schools to recognise the importance of building social networks and friendships on integration programmes was an important influence in helping to shape the attitudes of some of these young people towards integrated provision and hence their decisions to go to specialist colleges. Other people, generally parents, acted as gatekeepers to friendships, especially in situations where the family home was located at some distance from the school and this, combined with a reluctance to let their children travel independently or where it was just not physically possible, meant that some students were often entirely dependent on their families for any kind of social interaction. Sometimes this sprang from a failure to recognise the importance of access to friendships but it was also due to the overwhelming complexity of the issues that many of their families had to cope with.

### **Commentary**

I speculated at the start of this enquiry that aside from their disability or learning difficulty the influences on young people with special educational needs in making decisions about their future lives are no different from the influences on all young people. To a large extent this has turned out to be the case, so that the differences lay not so much in the nature of the influences but in how far these influences were acknowledged by others as an integral part of the young person's experience of growing up and deciding what they wanted to do when they left school. To ignore individual attributes such as personal interests, preferences and competences, the significance of friends in making post-school choices, the need to assert their adolescence and impending adulthood, the importance of gender and cultural differences, as well as to deny the need to explore individual 'horizons for action', is to maintain differences that are unjustifiable. Indeed, only by recognising the similarities will the processes be improved.

That is not to say that the influence of the young person's disability or learning difficulty should be ignored but it is here that the nature of the student's special educational need begins to make a difference. Those with sensory and physical disabilities had a strong sense of themselves as disabled and their disability was one of a number of factors, which influenced and shaped their ideas and opinions. The title of a recent radio programme on disability called 'No triumph, no tragedy'

captures the essence of what I am trying to say. What seemed to be missing in many of the accounts I have described was an understanding of disability in the context of the young people's experience of growing up and thinking about their future as disabled adults. Several of them expressed very clearly their belief in themselves as part of a separate, identifiable group. To disregard the impact of a young person's disability would be to ignore an integral part of who they are and how they have shaped their identities or have been shaped. Alternatively, to regard their disability as a tragedy and the overriding factor in considering their future lives is to ignore the other equally important aspects of themselves and who they want to become.

This section has also been concerned with the influence *of* young people on the decisions that are to be made, their personal agency. I began this section by briefly referring back to the structure/agency debate as it applies to career learning. While it would not be entirely accurate to make a clear distinction between those pupils with learning difficulties and those without, there was some correlation between learning difficulties and the extent to which they were allowed, and I use the word advisedly, to contribute to the decision-making process. Like the young people in Riddell *et al.*'s (1999) study, the students in this study were all able to express something about themselves and their preferences but as I also noted earlier the extent to which they were each enabled to assert their preferences or allowed to influence the process generally lay in the gift of others. As well as having strong personalities, Nasreen, Andrew, Stuart and John were accorded the right to assert their preferences albeit circumscribed by other considerations. Arguably Gavin, Malcolm and Kylie each asserted their choices by dropping out of school as circumstances overwhelmed them while Maria's, Sandra's and to some extent David's parents decided on their behalf. For Costas and Kim their modest aspirations went unheeded. Thus those pupils with learning difficulties were least likely to have their views considered.

There is also an assumption that the parents of young people with special educational needs play a much more significant role in the decision-making process than those of other youngsters. Again it appears to be a question of degree. Brannen (1996), Hodgkinson *et al.* (1996) and Ball *et al.* (2000) have all argued that the degree of involvement by families and their influence on young people in the decision-making processes has been underestimated by researchers and that only in the small minority

of cases is the family's role insignificant. On the other hand, in a number of the instances I have described here, and particularly in relation to students with learning difficulties, parental opinion superseded any views the child might have. So, while the majority of families do participate in the 'choreography of decision-making' (Ball *et al.*, 2000, p.144), the opinions of parents of children with learning difficulties were likely to be more dominant, in some cases excluding or overriding those of their children's. In the next chapter the nature of the influences on parents as well as their influence on the process is explored in more depth.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Family Fortunes**

#### **Introduction**

In the two previous chapters I have argued that most parents were directly involved in the decision-making processes and in some instances made choices on behalf of their child. That is not to say, as illustrated in Chapter 4, that parental preferences always held sway or that their opinions were always valued by other players in the process. Yet parental views were extremely important and in the course of trying to understand more about the influences on the decision-making process it became as necessary to understand the influences on parents as on the young people themselves. These factors not only shaped parents' views and opinions about their preferences for their child but how they responded during the processes that led up to a decision being made. In this chapter I explore some of the underlying reasons for the parental views and attitudes described in Chapter 4. Why were Mr and Mrs Simpson so frustrated by the school's lack of support in deciding on the best course of study for James? Why did Bill Francis become so angry with the college? Or why was Mrs Demetrios always persuaded to let Costas stay at school in the end? And why did some parents appear to have more influence than others?

Parental responses and the influences on those responses can be thought of as having three dimensions. First, the context in which parents found themselves, second, the strategies they adopted to cope with the situation and third, the factors which seemed to influence their responses.

#### **The context**

Parents were faced with three irrefutable facts: that their child had special educational needs, would have to leave school at some point in the near future and that she or he was getting older. As well as being incontrovertible, these factors also have a powerful influence on parents' thinking and behaviour. Turnbull and Turnbull (1990) describe the stress and anxiety that many parents of children with special needs

encounter as their child approaches the time to leave school. They suggest that many of the ordinary rituals of leaving school such as taking examinations, thinking about careers, getting a job, choosing a college or university are often absent serving only to emphasise the singularity of their children and the uncertainty of their futures. A number of the parents in this enquiry described how they dealt with the feelings they experienced. Sandra's mother, Mrs Harding, told how they preferred not to think about the future at all, 'To tell the truth we don't plan... We just go from day to day.' Mrs Bailey remembered thinking about this stage of Andrew's life when he started at his special school, 'We were a bit frightened about thinking about what would happen when he's 13 or 14. Every time there's a change coming up. You always think the worst, don't you?' Mr Doyle was comforted by the thought that Kim could stay on at school after 16 but described how new worries emerged as Kim approached each new transition: '... there was always a concern when she left Marchmount and went to the Upper School, what was happening then and the concern now she will continue there until 19 ...and then what happens after that?' He drew comfort from the fact, however, that he and his wife had coped with other similar changes, 'But if you go back to the stage when she started Marchmount that was a concern but that has gone along.'

Mr Hussein noted that many parents worry as the time comes for their child to leave school.

*'I mean, no parent likes their children going away from home, but nevertheless you have to accept it.'*

However, while expressing similar hopes to those of other parents, that their child would remain happy and safe, the parents in this study had many fears and dilemmas often exacerbated by the fact that they and their children had few real choices. Most worried about their long-term futures: what would happen if Stuart, Costas, James, Andrew and Malcolm could not get qualifications or jobs? All their parents feared that their children might have to go to a day centre. Mrs Simpson echoed the fears of each of these parents:

*'Well, we both want him to be as independent as possible and to have a proper job not sitting in a sheltered workshop-type place.'*

Kylie's mother feared that she would follow in her footsteps and drop out of school while Mr Hussein was worried about his daughter having to leave home and live at such a distance from the family. He wanted her to have the best education she could and he believed, like Nasreen, that only a specialist residential college would provide this. But he went on, 'I do worry for her, because I don't know what is going to happen to her.'

Andrew's parents and David's father were both concerned about their sons' social isolation and the possibility of bullying by local children. Both sets of parents wanted their children to go to residential college where they felt they would have friends and a good education. Yet, like Mr Hussein, they felt that their sons were too young to leave home and were worried that they would be unhappy. For the parents of Sandra, Kim, Maria and Malcolm their overriding concerns related to their children's safety, fearing physical or sexual abuse or abduction. As Mr Harding put it:

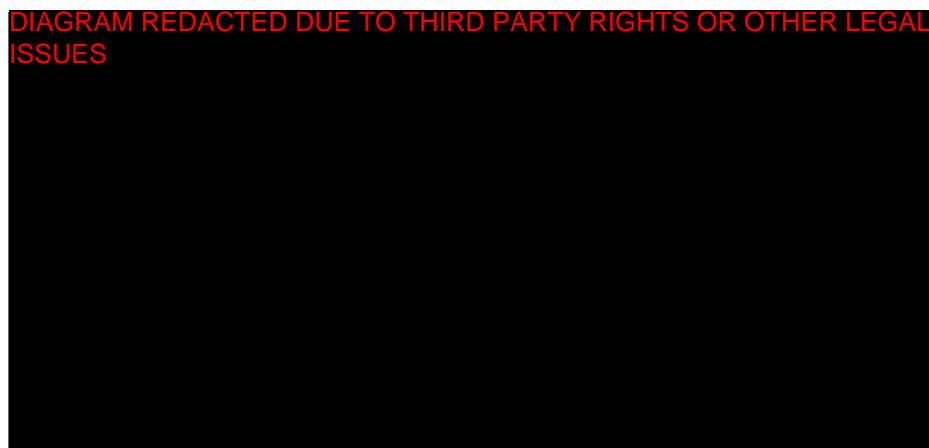
*'... a lot of these colleges I've heard some things about. People that stay at places, they end up being abused... I know people do get interviews but these people do get attracted to these jobs and if anything like that happened, I'd be extremely upset to say the least.'*

### **Coping strategies**

So for the parents this was a period of anxiety and uncertainty rather than optimism or hope. According to Lazarus's (1993) definition many of these parents were experiencing stress. In defining what is meant by stress Lazarus identifies four concepts. First, the significance that an individual attributes to particular factors in the environment and the dangers or benefits that may accrue to them or their dependents, in this case the fact that their child, who has a learning difficulty or disability, must eventually leave school. Second, stress is contextual so that individuals evaluate the situation by trying to identify what the threats might be and, in this case, most of the parents saw many dangers ahead as described above. Third, coping strategies are adopted to deal with the problem often resulting, fourthly, in some form of stress reaction, involving psychological and physiological responses.

Lazarus describes two broad types of coping strategy: *problem-focused* in which the dilemmas are worked through in a proactive manner, taking actions to alleviate the source of anxiety; and *emotion-focused* coping strategies in which individuals avoid thinking about the problem, as Mrs Harding described or reinterpreting the problem so that it becomes less threatening. Of course, sometimes individuals may adopt both approaches, reinterpreting the problem and taking steps to change or solve the issue they face. Lazarus (*op. cit.*) also emphasises the importance of seeing coping as a process, which he describes as, ‘people’s ongoing efforts in thought and action to manage specific demands appraised as taxing or overwhelming’.

Many of the individual stories I have described show this to be the case, as parents responded to the ebb and flow of events by altering their coping strategies accordingly, bearing out the second point that responses are also highly contextual, so that, for example, some parents responded very differently in the review meetings from the attitudes they adopted in our one-to-one discussions. In using Lazarus’s theory to understand parents’ responses I have found it helpful to think about these different approaches as two overlapping and concentric circles (see Fig. 6:1).



**Figure 6:1 The ebb and flow of coping strategies**

Adapted from Lazarus (1993)

In this study there were no examples of parents who adopted a purely proactive and problem-solving approach to coping with the issues surrounding their child leaving school. Instead most parents adopted combinations of problem and emotion-focused

strategies with first one strategy dominating and then the other. Some, such as Mr and Mrs Simpson, adopted a predominately proactive, problem-solving approach in an attempt to manage their underlying anxieties, while others such as Mrs Demetrios or Mr and Mrs Doyle adopted mainly emotion-focused strategies and then later attempted to or succeeded in adopting a problem-solving stance. Some parents (Mrs Long and Mr Lewis) appeared to cope by denying the existence of the problem or reconstructing the problem and seemed for a variety of reasons unable to take any positive steps to overcome their difficulties.

Before describing some examples of these different strategies, however, I want to consider those students and their parents who do not seem to fit this analysis: Mr Hussein and Nasreen, Mr and Mrs Brown and Stuart and Mrs MacBride and Gavin. Why did they appear to be different? I believe Stuart and Nasreen were accorded more autonomy in the decision-making process than the other students so that their parents seemed less involved although equally concerned. Both these students had a good deal of personal determination and self-efficacy. As, of course, did Gavin but he did not have the advantage of a stable home background and parents who would fight for him and worry about him to the same degree. A number of the professionals who supported Gavin cared and worried about him but, using Lazarus's definition, there was no one who felt threatened on his behalf.

*Predominantly problem-focused – 'Taking it step by step'*

While acknowledging their anxieties and worries, James's parents endeavoured to adopt a proactive and problem-focused approach to the dilemma about which course James should follow when he went into the sixth form and then on to college. His father, in particular, emphasised how important it was for James to try out various options and he saw the need to work logically to achieve this: '... Saturday morning (work experience), that is the next step. He ought to start trying different things.' Initially put off the idea by his teachers, Mrs Simpson persisted and eventually received a visit from a careers adviser who assured the family that she would be able to set up a Saturday morning job with very little trouble. However, the job never materialised.



Matching what James was doing at school with his possible longer-term direction was also important for his parents in helping James to plan. Both his parents went to a parents evening when James first entered the sixth form but were disappointed by the lack of clear information they received about what James was actually doing.

*'I came away confused. It didn't seem to fit with anything I tried to relate him to ...I still didn't understand whether he will end up with any qualifications and if he is we still don't know what it was. They seemed to be working from a syllabus, but we didn't see.'*

As well as trying to find out more about what James was doing at school, they asked the school to instigate a community mobility programme for him to improve his capacity to go up and down kerbs with his wheelchair, thereby increasing his independence. Again nothing materialised. It was hardly surprising then that both parents began to feel frustrated by the whole process. Summarising what he would have liked to help him through the process, Mr Simpson said:

*'Some sort of schedule or timetable and a checklist of things to do. I mean you only need simple stuff – just a single sheet – this is your idiot's guide or whatever. This would have helped make useful contacts.'*

Although James's parents tried to adopt a problem-solving approach they seemed to experience obstacles at every turn. While the simple solution of a checklist would not have solved all the difficulties they encountered, it might have gone some way to ameliorating some of the frustrations and anger they experienced.

#### *Problem-focused and emotion-focused*

My next example of how parents employed both problem-solving and emotion-focused coping strategies concerns Bill Francis, father of David. Bill acknowledged that he would occasionally feel panic-stricken when he considered the future: 'Sometimes I panic...what is he going to do, is he going to get stuck behind a computer screen for the rest of his life?' Bill was doing a university degree and as time passed and Bill got further into his course he found another way of thinking about the problem:

*'I think that is something I have picked up on over the last year, I have been more aware of, that they themselves see themselves as a community or different, and it is quite interesting how they see themselves as well, I am looking at his disability now. His disability is not a disability to him, I mean he just can't hear. But if you can talk his language he can communicate with you. It has just opened me up to a whole new sort of relationship for people with disabilities... And that is why I am looking at it and trying to think of the deaf community and this thing of disability, it is defined in the community in which it appears, so if they are all deaf it is not a disability... So I have been looking at it more positively.'*

As well as trying to reframe the way he thought about his son's disability as a way of helping to assuage some of his anxieties, Bill also took proactive steps to prepare his son for leaving home. He saw David as having no choice but to go away to college, believing that the local college would be unable to provide the level of communicator support that he felt David required. On the other hand he was concerned that David had never lived away from home and that at the age of 16 he was still relatively young to begin to do so. His solution, then, was to ask the school if David could become a weekly boarder to which the school reluctantly agreed.

#### *Emotion-focused and problem-focused*

As is so often the case it took some time for the reasons for Mr and Mrs Doyle's reluctance to let Kim travel independently to emerge. At my first meeting with her parents her father described their feelings about the school's wish for Kim to use public transport.

*'I mean it's a nightmare for us. I mean, they do mention her using public transport virtually unaided. I think not just yet. We have got to get confidence on that, you know.'*

However, by our second meeting Mr Doyle seemed more reconciled than his wife did to the idea of Kim travelling independently admitting that they were more frightened than their daughter was and that they were failing to recognise that she was growing up. Mrs Doyle remained unconvinced, reminding her husband that only recently a

paedophile had been reported as operating in the area. At the annual review in the same year the conversation turned to what Kim might do when she left school while at the same time alluding to the fact that she was also not an independent traveller.

Careers Adviser *I've met Kim two or three times. She's been to the Careers Office. Yesterday I met with her on her own, just to get to know her. I feel she's not ready to leave school yet... She really didn't know about her future. She's got no clear ideas. She's not an independent traveller.*

Kim *I like going by red bus. Don't like the tube.*

Careers Adviser *Her options are limited if she's not an independent traveller. I think she wants to go to college when she leaves school. There is a range of courses she could do which we will talk about next year. I did try but she said she didn't know.*

Chair *We all agree that Kim will stay on next year.*

Mrs Doyle *I'm very sorry to interrupt you. I was wondering about childcare. She's very good with children. I've had experience with children at Highgate Woods.*

Kim *My sister goes there.*

Careers Adviser *You mean work experience? The school does this.*

Teacher *Unless she can travel independently it's impossible to arrange work experience. Childcare is very difficult to get into.*

There are a number of points that could be made here about the use of language and what it implied about how the participants viewed their own and each other's contributions to the discussion but, for the purposes of this argument, I want to focus on Mrs Doyle's intervention and the teacher's response. At this point it seems that Mrs Doyle was continuing to deny that her refusal to let Kim travel independently would interfere with what Kim might do when she left school, much to the irritation of Kim's teacher, and possibly, the careers adviser. A bit later in the meeting Mrs Doyle again raised the topic of travel, but this time she began to confront her own emotions as well. Very nervously she said:

*'The major problem is she's not an independent traveller. It's her fear of escalators. My experience with the King's Cross disaster... We live in Coalport Lane and I can't let her cross such a busy road – no way. She isn't an independent traveller.'*

Later I asked Kim's teacher about what her mother had said and she explained that Mrs Doyle had been at King's Cross during the London Underground fire. Even prior to the disaster, Mr Doyle had also always needed support from his wife before going on escalators. So the use of public transport was a problem for both Kim and her parents and their emotions associated with this decision appeared to be blocking the way to finding any kind of solution. Yet, in the course of the meeting, Mrs Doyle was beginning to move towards not only recognising the problem but asking for help to solve it and it was agreed, as an outcome of the meeting, that the community health team would begin to work with the family. Gradually, with the help of the school and the community mental health team, Mr and Mrs Doyle had begun to work towards a proactive strategy for working on their anxieties.

Mrs Demetrios provided a further example of how parents can start out by being predominately emotion-focused in their approach and then appear to adopt a more proactive stance.

It had taken a long time for Mr and Mrs Demetrios to come to terms with the fact that Costas had a learning difficulty and they were uncertain as to whether Costas should remain at school. They felt their son should not have been at Marchmount School because it did not match his needs. While they both liked the staff, they felt that the school was not sufficiently challenging and insufficient attention was paid to basic skills and the development of vocational skills. As a result, they wanted Costas to leave school and go out to work. They had taken Costas for extensive diagnostic testing and had paid considerable sums of money for a private tutor to work with him after school. Yet, as I described in Chapter 4, as a result of each review Mrs Demetrios was persuaded to let Costas stay at school a further year. From the school's point of view there were very few alternatives for Costas, apart from going to college. The reasons for Mrs Demetrios' change of mind may well have been affected by her attitude towards teachers as authority figures and her feelings of deference which this engendered. As well as her concern that I should not discuss her opinions with the

school after the annual review meeting, she described her reluctance to speak out in front of the headteacher as follows:

*'They should be learning because they don't have high enough expectations. I don't think it's good. I won't say that. I can't say that to the headteacher. When the headteacher asked me I can't say anything. What will be will be.'*

However, a year on she seemed to have gained in confidence. This is what she said:

*'...because I always let him (her husband) do the talking but because he couldn't make it so I thought whatever I have got to say I've got to say it.'*

In Chapter 4 I described how, a few days before the annual review meeting, she had heard from a neighbour about a sheltered employment scheme run by Marks and Spencer's for people with learning difficulties. She was delighted, feeling that this was exactly what Costas required and said as much at the meeting. However, whereas she had envisaged her son being able to start work, the school suggested he did a work experience. Mrs Demetrios did not challenge this idea. After the meeting, however, she began to wonder whether she should have been more assertive.

Int. *So you got that information from a friend?*

Mrs Demetrios *I had no idea at all, no idea whatsoever. I never knew Marks and Spencer's did anything like that, not all.*

Int. *So you haven't spoken to the careers service or anybody?*

Mrs Demetrios *No, nobody. I haven't spoken to anybody because I thought if he is going to do one more year in school...what do you think? Shall I speak to them? I don't know.*

Int. *Well, it depends whether you think that would be a useful thing to do. I think if you are interested in the scheme perhaps you should.*

Mrs Demetrios *I am interested. I am all for it... But the teachers said they are going to put it down in his file...*

As our conversation continued Mrs Demetrios became more determined so that in the end she said:

*'Yes, that's it. I will have to get in touch with the career officer. I have met her in the school. It is worth just getting in touch with her.'*

Yet, despite her determination to be more proactive, Mrs Demetrios did not contact the Careers Adviser and by the following year very little had changed. In this instance, Mrs Demetrios wanted to take some action but, for whatever reason, could not do so. Perhaps it was her feelings of deference for authority and schools, which made it hard for her to assert herself, perhaps she wanted more support from her husband. Whatever the reasons, Costas remained at school for yet another year and did just one day's work experience at Marks and Spencer.

#### *Predominantly emotion-focused*

How individuals handle stressful periods in their lives and the strategies they adopt can be partly explained by personality type. For instance, some people seem naturally more optimistic and able to think more positively than others (Peterson, Maier and Seligman 1993). An individual's physical or mental state may also alter their responses. For example, it is possible that the agoraphobia of Malcolm's father contributed to his refusal to let Malcolm travel independently and led to his failure to recognise the possible connection between this and Malcolm's challenging behaviour. The overwhelming difficulties for Mrs Long of bringing up a young family on her own led to her being unable to engage with Kylie's future and how best to support her. It is perhaps also significant that, in both of these cases, their children dropped out of school of their own accord.

Mr Lewis recognised the family's dependency on his wife to take control of matters.

*'Some days we just look at one another and want to run out and not come back. You know what I mean... Because what I have been through, I have been through hell and back, with my nerves and that, she (his wife) is the backbone of the family really and sometimes she corrects (me) now and again and I understand.'*

As well as paying tribute to his wife's support he also graphically describes how he wants to avoid the problems they have with Malcolm by running away. Throughout

our conversations his father moved between acknowledging Malcolm's wish to be seen as a young adult as discussed in the previous chapter and wanting to keep Malcolm at home with a personal tutor.

*'I would love a home tutor for Malcolm and when he wants to go out with Sally (his wife) shopping or whatever, it would be lovely, that is how I would like it...'*

Mr Lewis never really confronted the fact that Malcolm was growing up and would have to leave school and left it to his wife to solve their problems.

I had had a great deal of difficulty making contact with Mrs Long as she and the family had moved several times, they were not on the telephone, Kylie had prolonged spells of absence from school and the school did not always have accurate records of the family's whereabouts. So it was not until the final year of the study that I met Mrs Long at Kylie's final review and transition planning meeting, which was held in their home.

I noticed that throughout the meeting, which was also attended by Mrs Gray the SENCO and the Careers Adviser, Mrs Long sat on the floor despite there being enough chairs available. I felt embarrassed by this and later I apologised but she shrugged it off. It seemed to me that her sitting on the floor was symptomatic of her feelings of hopelessness and lack of control over the deteriorating situation in the family. Throughout the meeting the other three boys drifted in and out still in their pyjamas at 11.00 in the morning on a school day. She scarcely spoke in the meeting but kept glancing at Kylie to see how she was responding. When it was suggested that Kylie should do a taster day at the local college her mother responded enthusiastically but apart from this said little else.

Afterwards, when I spoke to her, she shared her anxieties about Kylie's future. She said she tried to get her to go to bed at 10.00 p.m. so that Kylie would get up in the morning but, since Mrs Long worked at the local pub and did not get home until 11.30 at night, she could not supervise this. The whole impression, created by the meeting and my subsequent discussion, was someone who was overwhelmed by her problems of which Kylie's future was just one. Returning to Lazarus' definition of stress, it

could be argued that in Mrs Long's case when appraising the range of external pressures she faced, e.g. the arrest of one son for stealing and begging, the suspension from school of another, loss of her partner and job, Kylie's future seemed the least of her worries. In many ways she had probably already handed over the responsibility of deciding Kylie's future to Kylie herself.

### **Influences on parental responses**

Lazarus argues that emotional responses to situations are governed by the juxtaposition of our personal beliefs and motives with environmental demands. These internal beliefs and attitudes are informed and shaped by other external influences, in this instance the most significant of these being the parents' role as carers, personal experiences of education and work, experience of professionals and parental access to information.

#### *Role as carer*

For most parents their role as carer diminishes as their children grow up. For parents of children with special educational needs they often see this responsibility remaining with them for the rest of their lives and, as they contemplate a future of eternal caring, they begin to worry also about what will happen when they die.

There was no question that Mr and Mrs Harding saw themselves as the principal carers.

Int.                    *In the future do you see yourselves as providing pretty much most of what she receives in school now?*

Mr Harding        *Yeah, pretty much. That about covers it. 'Cos I mean we are a family. I know the circumstances are a lot different but our son goes to work and comes home everyday, 'til he gets married and leaves. But see, Sandra won't have that either, not at the moment she won't have it because I don't think she can develop that way. Um... have that sort of responsibility so we see it developing here in the family home with her friends around her.*

Mrs Harding       *Our friends get involved.*

Int.                    *And your parents take her out?*



Mrs Harding *A wide range of, like, Peter's friends come round. It's not as though she's staying in with just us two and nothing else and she had to stay here all the time and never went out.*

This wide network of informal support including extended family members as well as family friends is illustrative of the ecosystemic approaches which US commentators in particular have written about in recent years. Building on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecosystemic theory described in Chapter 2, family systems theorists such as Pell and Cohen (1995) and Beckman (1996) have argued that formal structures and systems are not sufficiently effective in supporting families of children with disabilities or learning difficulties. Instead, ways need to be developed to increase the capacity of families to cope through recognising and building on informal support structures in concert with official or formal systems. While the Hardings already had these informal structures in place, these were not valued by the school, who rather derided the interdependence which they felt characterised Sandra's relationship with her family.

But while the Hardings reaped the benefits of a supportive extended family, Mrs Harding also worried about the fact that their own parents were becoming elderly and consequently more dependent upon them. One of the reasons she dared to wonder about Sandra living away from home for part of the week was the pressure she knew would fall mainly on her to care for her elderly relatives as well. Mr Harding was adamant, however, that they would cope and even persuaded Mrs Harding against making contact with a local parents support group.

This view of themselves as 'coping against all the odds' was one shared by a number of other parents. Mr and Mrs Simpson, Mr and Mrs Bailey, and Mrs Constandis each described how they had had to fight for what they wanted for their child.

Here is Mr Simpson describing their experiences:

*'If you sit back nothing will happen. That's been our experience of these things, if you go out and look for something it is usually there.'*

Mrs Bailey makes the same point:

*'It's always been up to us to ask, nobody has said that you can have this or that, you have always had to push it, you always have to push.'*

Mrs Constandis was dissatisfied with both the schooling and the care provision made for her daughter. She felt that the school was not stretching her daughter sufficiently, unlike the previous school, while the care home did not feed Maria properly. How far these feelings of dissatisfaction sprang from her own difficulties in coming to terms with her child's degenerative condition, rather than basic flaws in the quality of provision, is hard to say. She described how Maria had been making good progress but had then started to slip backwards and indeed for Mrs Constandis coping with the fact that her daughter had a degenerative condition must have been especially hard to bear. It was probably more bearable to attribute her daughter's condition to outside factors.

If the feelings engendered by how parents saw their roles are taken into account, then it is not surprising that when the time came for their children to leave school Mr and Mrs Simpson felt angry to be told that it was too soon to discuss James's options while Mrs Constandis just took matters into her own hands. Professionals rarely seemed to recognise parents' need to be proactive and to take steps to facilitate their involvement. The extent of their involvement tended to be on the system's terms.

#### *Experiences of education and work*

Experiences of education and work were important in framing both positive and negative attitudes towards future options and the decisions that needed to be made. It is easy to see, for example, how Bill Francis's ideas had been shaped by his university course or how Andrew's father's experience of working as an electrician provided Andrew with some useful insights and contacts in the electrical trade and knowledge of the training required. Likewise, Mrs Doyle's experience of the King's Cross fire had obviously contributed to her fear of Kim travelling on public transport.

Mr Doyle, in his work at a supermarket, had encountered a young man working at the store on a sheltered employment scheme. This had had both a positive and a negative impact on him. He had not known anything about such schemes beforehand and

thought that they were a good idea: they created real work opportunities and they were a means of educating the general public about people with disabilities. On the other hand he was also very concerned about how his colleague was treated by the store managers and staff.

*'...there is only one at the moment and I mean he gets support from a chap who comes in and visits him but it is not him who is the problem, it is the people he works with are the problem because they don't understand. I do, no problem at all for me and it is they who need the education, not him... He comes and sits with me at a table and talks to me but the other idiots that are about, they try to make fun of him which is hurtful and it is lack of education on their part and that is what you get... it is a worrying scene. It does happen at work and he is doing the kind of job that grinds you down. He is doing baskets all day long from one end of the store to the other. He could do something else, of course he could, but there is no one there to relieve him on that because there is...it is the wrong assumption from Safeways' point of view of the management there as well because he could be doing something that would stimulate his brain... I don't think they respect the job he does. I mean I have corrected a few of them up there in the staff canteen. They are the ones with the problem, not him. That type of thing is worrying. If they get in with a decent group of workers in a smaller working environment where people would understand as well, maybe with older people they would understand rather better than younger people, then I would think it a good idea (for Kim). That is the type of thing when the time comes.'*

Prior to going to university, Bill Francis had attended an Access course at a local college and it was during his time there that he formed his opinion about the quality of support they could offer his son. He had observed large groups of people with learning difficulties in the cafeteria and he became convinced that this was not an appropriate environment for David. Based on his reformulated view of David's identity as member of the deaf community, Bill believed that David needed support from a deaf peer group which the local college could not provide.

In trying to understand what to expect, a number of parents referred to their experiences with their other children such as choosing options at Key Stage 4,

applying for college, meeting careers advisers or getting work experience. These were sometimes used to question why their child with special needs had not been offered similar experiences such as Mr and Mrs Simpson's request for a Saturday job for James.

So, parents drew on a range of experiences of education and work to shape their opinions and ideas about their child's options. However, one of the most powerful influences was parents' experience of professionals and it is to this that I now turn.

### *Experiences of professionals*

Much has been written about the negative opinions that many parents have of professionals (Weatherley, 1979; Harry, 1992; Sandow, 1994) and in many ways the parents in my study were no exception. In general, however, schools and teachers were regarded as supportive and parents' main source of advice: 'I get all my advice from Janet (Andrew's teacher). She is great'; 'You can just walk in...they are very receptive'; 'You can talk to him (the headteacher) like a friend.' So there was a strong sense of reliance on the school as a source of support and stability and it may well have been that this feeling contributed to some families being persuaded to let their children stay on at school. Contact with other support services such as Social Services was much patchier and the attitudes of parents much more ambivalent.

Careers advisers also began to play an important role although, again, parental attitudes towards them were mixed. Bill Francis described how they had 'fought' for David to go to the residential college but Mr and Mrs Simpson's perspective captures some of the dilemmas that many careers advisers encounter as they tried to steer a course between government policy and advocating on behalf of parents and students. The main issue for parents seemed to be one of trust and the feeling that some staff were not impartial, their suspicions of officialdom, fear of the consequences of complaining, and the tensions experienced by some parents between trust and deference.

In reflecting on the school-leaving process, Mr and Mrs Simpson said that they felt as if the careers adviser had had her own agenda and was not impartial in the advice she gave. The discussion went as follows:

- Mrs Simpson *But I didn't feel as if she was really 100% behind us somehow.*
- Mr Simpson *It's difficult with these things. I am never too clear whether people are working for us or whether they are working for the system or... whether they are representing us personally, to push our case, or whether they are just there as an arbitrator or somebody to sift out, you know, the good from the bad. I think that's the problem, isn't it. It's difficult to identify who is the right person to get to push the case.*
- Mrs Simpson *I did also – I also (I don't know whether I was just being over-sensitive), but I got the impression all the time that she didn't really think James should go to Barnwood, she thought he should go local, didn't she?*
- Mr Simpson *I did seem to get that impression. Although I don't know what her agenda was, I suppose, at the end of the day and she seemed to be trying to get us to go round those colleges to get a negative result, she seemed to be at one stage looking for a negative result from the local colleges. I don't know whether there were different agendas going on.*
- Int. *So you didn't understand why you had to go to the local colleges?*
- Mr. Simpson *Well, I sort of saw, you know, some logic in it, but I could see that it was fruitless anyway... I wasn't too sure who was working for us and who wasn't. And whether we were being vetted by the person we were dealing with, or whether we were being supported by the person we were dealing with. It seemed to be an unknown. We didn't have a clear picture of what the rules were. Like you said, there are rules, I don't know whether they are written down. I didn't see a copy of anything... did you?*

Thus, because they did not trust the advice they were getting, they experienced increased feelings of confusion.

In the above passage, Mr Simpson also refers to wanting sight of official rules and procedures but other parents were suspicious of official documents. Mr Francis was wary of the local authority, believing that they made pupils' needs fit the provision

rather than the other way round. Because he mistakenly believed that the LEA also managed the local college he felt that, despite what they may say, the college did not have the facilities to support David adequately. So convinced was he of this fact, that he threatened to physically attack the local college's learning support co-ordinator unless he wrote a statement to say that the college could not meet David's needs.

Mrs Constandis also shared these suspicions of officialdom. She believed that what was said in official meetings made no difference to outcomes, that officials did not know what was happening in practice and she doubted the competence of practitioners.

*'I don't know that what we say at the review is going to happen anyway. I don't think things get carried through, it just depends. I think it depends on what they have available at the time.'*

This disillusionment with officialdom probably helps to explain why she did not contribute to her daughter's annual review and transition planning meeting and why in the end she organised Maria's post-school provision herself. Despite Mrs Constandis's mistrust of professionals, she said she was reluctant to complain in case her daughter was punished. There was no evidence to suggest that either the care home or the school would have responded in this way yet the fear of professional power was pervasive.

The final dimension I want to explore in relation to parents and professionals is the tension between trust and deference I encountered in some of the parents. A similar tension was identified by Harry (1992) in her work in the United States with mothers from Puerto Rico of children with special educational needs. Harry attributes such feelings of deference to the cultural background of these mothers and this could also help to explain the apparently contradictory responses of both Mrs Demetrios and Mr Hussein. I have already described, despite her criticisms of the school to me, the difficulties Mrs Demetrios experienced in speaking out in meetings, particularly in front of the headteacher (a man) and how she tended to back down in meetings at the school, often sounding apologetic and always saying in the end, 'They (the teachers) know best.' Mr Hussein was also full of praise for the school:

*'...school is tremendous. It gives me hope, I couldn't live without the school. And the staff at the school are absolutely marvellous.'*

When Mr Hussein was reluctant to let Nasreen go away to college it was the headteacher who had persuaded him to let her go. Yet Mr Hussein also felt disempowered by the headteacher when at the same meeting, Mr Hussein had asked what would happen if the funding for the residential college was not agreed. The headteacher had replied that there were other options:

Mr Hussein      *They say they are very confident that the funding will come through and they say if it doesn't they have got another option. They did not discuss it at the time.*

Int.                *They did not discuss it with you?*

Mr Hussein      *No, they said they could not discuss it at the time, but if the finance did not go through they have got other options.*

Int.                *How did you feel about that?*

Mr Hussein      *Not very good because I would rather know what they can do next...*

Int.                *Would you feel able to challenge them about that?*

Mr Hussein      *No, I didn't because he (the headteacher) said it wasn't appropriate.*

Despite Mr Hussein wanting to know more, he did not feel able to ask the headteacher for any more information. Here there was a feeling of the headteacher exercising an undue degree of power by withholding information from a parent.

Access to information played an important part in increasing parental power and influence within the decision-making process yet such information was not always forthcoming. Even when this was available, parental attitudes towards professionals and the advice they gave influenced the trust they placed in the information they received.

#### *Access to information and communication*

At first, many parents in the study, like Mrs Bailey, found it difficult to articulate what information they needed but as time went on they became clearer.

*'People say, we should ask these things but you don't know to ask anything, do you? I mean you think about each stage as it comes and I really didn't think about it and when I did start to think about it I started to get a bit panicky about it. "What am I going to do?" It all sort of fell into place ...sort of mapped out for us more or less, which was a great help. But then, as I said, I could have asked but I didn't. I didn't ask it because I didn't know there was any reason to ask.'*

Parents' information needs fell into six broad categories:

- procedural information, i.e. how decisions would be made;
- what were the roles of the different services, and who was responsible for doing what;
- information about post-school options such as colleges and training schemes and the type of programmes they offered as well as employment options;
- practical information about benefits or equipment;
- long-term options and support such as university entrance or support for their children after they died;
- information and guidance on helping their child deal with sexuality and life-span issues.

Sources of information fell into two main types: official information received through formal channels and informal information often gleaned through chance encounters. Official channels included review meetings; parents' evenings; special events laid on by schools; visits; school newsletters; voluntary organisations; official letters and forms.

How parents responded to these varied enormously. For example, both Mr and Mrs Demetrios and Mr and Mrs Lewis had attended an evening put on by Social Services and the school to discuss post-school options. On the face of it this seemed a sensible thing to do, but whereas Mr and Mrs Lewis had found the whole event very reassuring and helpful, Costas' parents were horrified with what they heard reflecting their mistrust of Social Services and anything that suggested that Costas might have a disability.



Most parents saw the school as their main source of information although sometimes attitudes changed in the light of experience. While Mrs Harding had said quite confidently at the outset that the school would help them find a placement for Sandra, by our final meeting she had completely lost her faith in their capacity to do so.

*'The school said that they were looking into some others for us but they were pretty useless... they didn't offer us anything.'*

One of the main difficulties parents encountered with official documents and meetings was the language used. Sometimes they did not understand certain terms, e.g. attainment levels, GNVQ etc., while at other times they found the language alienating such as that used in college prospectuses. On two occasions I was greeted by parents asking me to read letters they had received from Social Services to explain what they meant. Parents were upset by terms used as a matter of course by some services, such as 'handicapped' or 'registered deaf'. In line with their general mistrust of professionals, Bill Francis and Mrs Constandis were also sceptical about the official information they were given: they wanted to check things for themselves and Mrs Constandis had made sure that she was on a number of local committees.

The other main sources of information could be described as informal, i.e. family friends and neighbours, other parents and pupils, the media, leaflets that happened to be dropped through the door. Often, this kind of information tended to confirm rather than challenge already formulated views. For example, Mrs Harding described how she and her husband were watching television one day:

*'Chris and I were watching it and we didn't talk – we just looked, and I can't bear the thought that she would be taken away and something awful would happen to her. Some of these residential homes are quite frightening. I know there are absolutely marvellous ones as well. But it is a worry to think that she is helpless – well, she's not helpless – you would think she couldn't do anything for herself. She is a very innocent little girl. I hate the thought of anything hurting her and we couldn't be there to protect her. On this estate – we are lucky really – because my neighbours are always worrying in case people are awful to kids. You know, kids can be cruel, can't they.'*

*Her brother, all his mates are around here all the time, they all treat her as normal. She's normal on this estate. She is not classed as being abnormal or anything like that. When she is at home we can talk to her every night. We can say "What did you do?" She'd soon tell me if something was wrong. Whereas if she is away for weeks on end... I hope you don't think we are being selfish. In a way she should be more independent and she's not going to be independent if we don't let her go. But I think she is getting quite independent in the school that she is at. She copes well with that.'*

By Sandra's final review and transition planning meeting in February no provision had been identified. The Careers Adviser agreed to help the family explore more local alternatives but by the end of May nothing had happened. Then a remarkable coincidence happened as Mrs Harding described.

*'...By chance Kirsty lives up on this new estate here and she said I have had a leaflet through the door just telling us about Hillside College saying if you wonder what all the cars are for we have an opening evening and we apologise for the parking and they said if anyone wants to come and have a look round do come, so we thought we would go up and have a look and it was only by chance we went up one evening and as soon as you walked in the place that was it, it was the very thing we were looking for, we felt so relieved going there.'*

In this case, information which should have been provided through the school and careers service only reached parents by chance and in the next chapter I will explore some of the underlying reasons why the support services apparently failed to provide this family with the information they needed. This was to all intents and purposes a complete breakdown of the kind of transition planning process envisaged by the Code of Practice.

Eight sets of parents mentioned other parents or children at the same school as sources of information. Reference was also made to parents support groups although these were generally groups that parents knew of or had once belonged to rather than them currently being active participants. It is likely that some perceived other parents as being trustworthier than official information sources and this seems to be borne out by

parents' responses to what would have helped. Four sets of parents said they would have liked someone impartial to talk to on a one-to-one basis. As Mrs Simpson put it:

*'I would like someone to say to me... because I don't think we know all the options, I think it would be useful for somebody to say, look, let's talk about this, see there's all these different things you can do.'*

Coupled with the absence of many of the traditional markers associated with growing up and leaving school, the available options were often unclear, as were the procedures associated with planning the next stage. This lack of clear and reliable information only added to parents' sense of anxiety.

### **Commentary**

It is clear from other studies that whether or not their child has special educational needs, the influence of families on post-school destinations is significant although the strength of that influence varies. Studies by Siann and Knox (1992), Hodgkinson *et al.* (1996), Foskett and Hesketh (1997) and Ball (2000) have all demonstrated its importance. However, the degree of direct involvement in the decision-making process varies and like parents of the young Muslim women in Siann and Knox's research, parents in my study were deeply involved. Yet professionals were not always prepared to take cognisance of this and to recognise parental needs for support and information. Parents relied on their own local support networks and experiences, which in turn acted as powerful influences in shaping their views and opinions.

The whole process of leaving school was characterised for most of the parents in this study as a very stressful time. Stress influenced how they responded to the situation and the extent to which they were able to influence the proceedings.

One of the difficulties in analysing the factors that influence how and why people respond to particular situations as they do is distinguishing between what is a trait and thus an integral part of an individual's personality, i.e. *x* always responds like that so what do you expect – and what is a factor, that is external variables within a given situation that trigger a particular response. Instead, most are complex interactions between internal and external factors. Since I only encountered each of these families

over a given period of time and within a given context, it was not possible for me to observe how they responded in different contexts, nor did I seek to find out through using tests or other measures so that, for example, I do not know if Mrs. Constandis was always so independent or Mrs Demetrios so deferential. What is clear from these findings, however, is that some parents who wanted to be more proactive and problem-focused were not supported in doing so, while others who tried to do so became frustrated or disillusioned. Others were uncertain about their role in the transition planning processes and how far they should get involved.

While I have drawn on psychological explanations to understand why some parents responded as they did, I have also explored those external or structural influences that seemed important in formulating parents' attitudes and beliefs. It was clear that some parents were much more confident than others in expressing their opinions. To what extent were these differences attributable to class (see Appendix 12 Table 6:1)? Recognising the constraints of this very small sample of parents, the answer appears to be to some extent but not entirely. Ethnicity was also important as was knowledge of the education system and 'know-how'. The two sets of parents who could be said to have engaged most proactively with the professionals in the decision-making processes (Mr and Mrs Bailey and Mr and Mrs Simpson) and who expressed their opinions most forcibly were both white, middle-class families. Yet Bill Francis, arguably working class, was also forcible in expressing his opinions but he had knowledge of education through his own university course and his wife's job. Two of the four ethnic minority families were owner-occupiers and were managers, yet both Mr and Mrs Demetrios and Mr Hussein found it difficult to assert themselves in meetings whereas Mrs Constandis, as an FE lecturer, was able to exercise her will albeit not in liaison with professionals. On the whole, however, working class parents (Mr and Mrs Doyle; Mr and Mrs Harding; Mr and Mrs Lewis; Mrs Long) lacked the confidence to express their opinions in official meetings or, even where they did so, their views were less likely to be attended to.

Careful observation and analysis has enabled me, from what was a privileged position, to observe how many of these parents, like their children, were not heard and their needs were not recognised in the decision-making process. In the next chapter I

will explore some of the influences and pressures on professionals in an attempt to explain why this was so often the case.

## Chapter 7

### Professionals, Policies and Procedures

#### Introduction

At the start of Chapter 4, I described the decision-making ‘unit’ as having a central core consisting of the young people and their parents or carers and then an outer layer or network made up of others, often professionals, who also influenced the decision-making processes, as well as the decisions that were made. These professionals not only had varying levels of commitment to the young people and their families, they also had different perceptions of individuals’ needs. While their job titles remained constant, the individuals fulfilling those roles sometimes changed from year to year as, for instance, in the case of class teachers. Sometimes personnel changed because the previous post-holder left or because, as in the case of Social Services, responsibility shifted from child to adult services. A breakdown of the teachers interviewed and their relationship to the young people is given in Appendix 17.

What were the influences on these professionals during the decision-making processes and how did they exercise their influence? Professionals can find themselves torn between the need to make their jobs more manageable, the underlying policies and legislation, which should guide how they work and the demands made by students, parents and other professionals. The 1994 *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs*, currently under review, lays down the approach which LEAs and schools should adopt in planning transitional programmes. The Code assumes that one of the main purposes of the transition planning process is to support the young people and their families in making choices about their post-school destinations, which should entail a multi-agency approach. The Code makes reference to other relevant legislation governing the work, for example, of the careers service, Social Services and colleges of further education. Table 7:1 summarises the main provisions of the 1994 Code of Practice, in operation during the course of this study, and the revisions likely to be introduced by the revised version.

**Table 7:1 Summary of changes to the Code of Practice guidance on transition**

<b>1994 Code of Practice</b>	<b>Revised Code of Practice</b>
No underlying principles	Introduces set of underlying principles
First transitional review at 14+ annual review meeting	First transitional review at Year 9 annual review meeting
LEA convenes meeting	School convenes meeting
Careers Service must be invited	Connexions Service must be invited
Social Services must be invited	No change
Social Services assessment at 14+	Social Services assessment at 14+ and Connexions Service assessment in final year at school
LEA must prepare transition report and circulate	Headteacher must draw up transition plan in consultation with Connexions Service and circulate
LEA oversees implementation of plan	Connexions Service is responsible for implementation of plan
LEAs responsible for transfer of information from school to FE sector	Connexions Service responsible for transfer of information from school to FE

What is the nature of the relationship between young people, parents and professionals envisaged by the Code of Practice? Currently there is nothing in the Code, for example, to suggest that the young people or their parents must be invited to the transition planning meetings, although it is proposed that the latter should be fully involved in contributing to any plans that are drawn up and after the meeting the transition plan must be circulated to parents. More generally, schools are encouraged by the Code to work in 'partnership' with parents but as Sandow (1994), among others, has pointed out, this is a slippery concept, with comforting connotations but

open to multiple interpretations and meanings. Drawing on the ecosystemic approach I described in Chapter 2 and in line with Sandow's own proposition that every family is individual and demands an individualistic response, the redrafted version of the Code suggests that schools need to find out how parents prefer to work with schools. Here then partnership working could mean, as in the case of Mrs Constandis, leaving parents to make their own arrangements about their child's post-school destination or, alternatively, changing the format of annual review meetings to encourage parents to feel more at ease. Working in this way would demand an in-depth knowledge of the dynamics of the family and personal preferences on the part of professionals and suggests a much more flexible approach to accommodate the changing needs of parents and young people than is currently the case.

The other consideration is, who are the professionals? The Code of Practice recommends that a wide range of services get involved with the young people and their families in supporting the transition planning process: the careers service, Social Services, healthcare services, further education college staff, LEA officers, educational psychologists. A breakdown of who was present at each of the 18 transition planning meetings I attended is shown in Table 7:2 and serves to illustrate the degree of involvement by each of the other services.

**Table 7:2 Involvement in transition planning meetings by other services**

<b>Type of service</b>	<b>Number of meetings at which services were represented</b>
Teachers	18
Headteachers/Deputy head teachers/ SENCO	15
Careers Advisers	8
Occupational therapists	3
Social workers	3
Educational Psychologists	3
LEA representatives	3
Community mental health team members	1
Speech therapist	1



Clearly the involvement of different services is driven by the needs of the individual pupil. For example, not every pupil will require occupational therapy support or speech therapy. The two services that were legally required to have some involvement with all statemented pupils were the Careers and Social Services, both of which appeared, on occasions, to be struggling to meet the Code's expectations.

The implementation of such policies and procedures is dependent upon the extent to which professionals at local level accept or reject their new responsibilities, as well as their interpretation of any new procedures. This can lead to significant variations in practice. Often, to ensure that legislation is enacted, checks and balances are put in place so that inspections or audits are conducted. Since the transition planning guidance is not enshrined in law and local authorities only have to 'have regard' to its proposals, local authorities and schools have considerable freedom in how they interpret the Code. Furthermore, because the enactment of the guidance spans not only phases but disciplines, checking the quality of the overall process is almost impossible. There have been, for instance, no joint OFSTED, FEFC and Social Services inspections of the effectiveness of transition planning arrangements.

Lipsky in Weatherley and Lipsky (1977) argues that public sector workers (whom I have referred to as 'professionals' in this context) exercise their influence through the ways in which they interpret their jobs, consequently wielding a significant degree of power and influence over their clients, as well as over the implementation of policies. He suggests that public sector workers adopt three approaches in response to new policies: by modifying the demands of their clients; by reconceptualising whom their clients are; by reconceptualising their roles. Lipsky's rather pessimistic analysis of public sector workers' behaviour and their responses to policy does not go far enough, however, in understanding how the professionals in this study responded to their role in the transition planning process and how this in turn influenced the outcomes. Thomas and Loxley (2001) present three criticisms of Lipsky's concept of the street level bureaucrat. Citing Fitz *et al.* (1994) they claim that Lipsky over-emphasises the idea of resistance, ignores the effects of previous policies and neglects the influence of structural factors on individual responses. Instead, they prefer the approach of Ball (1994). Policies are, according to Ball, 'representations which are encoded in complex

ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations) and decoded in complex ways (via actors' interpretations and reinterpretations in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context)' (p.16). This definition suggests a much more complex, dynamic and fluid approach to the question of policy development and implementation.

In analysing the responses of the professionals in this study to transition policies, Ball's conceptualisation helps to recognise that individuals bring their own personal circumstances and perspectives to bear on their interpretations as well as recognising that policies are not introduced into a vacuum. In many instances, practice precedes policy and professionals already have their own beliefs about what makes for effective practice. It seemed to me, listening to professionals talking and observing them at work, that they were not solely concerned with their survival – many had a real commitment to the needs of the students and their families, and were sometimes faced with genuine dilemmas about the best course of action to take. Their responses could be described as possessing the following characteristics:

- no fundamental changes to practice, continuing to rely on custom and practice;
- accommodating or going through the motions of new procedures and processes but without challenging underlying assumptions;
- questioning previous practice with a view to challenging underlying assumptions and making changes;
- changes to practice but in ways not envisaged by the policy.

### **Responses to transition policies and procedures**

#### *Custom and practice*

In this first section I explore the extent to which professionals continued to rely on custom and practice in guiding their work during the school-leaving period, without radically altering their practice. Assumptions continued to be made about what was 'best' and the Code's recommendations appeared to have little impact. Two issues are discussed: the timing of discussions about leaving and first transitional reviews; and staff assumptions about post-16 destinations.

- *Timing*

At the time of this study, the Code recommended that the first transition planning meeting should take place when the pupil was 14+. Yet parents reported that, even though their child was only two or three years off the statutory school-leaving age, they were deflected when they had tried to raise the subject of school leaving with the schools. Delaying discussions about post-school options could be seen as a means of regulating demands on staff time, or looked at another way, delaying discussions could be seen as a way of protecting parents and pupils from undue anxiety. Special schools, for their part, often assumed that all their pupils would progress into their sixth forms and that parents were aware of the sixth forms' existence. However, this was not always the case. School policy, in this instance, was based on custom and practice rather than the needs of young people or their parents and two or three years after its introduction the Code had done little to challenge these practices.

When they had tried to raise the subject of school leaving Mrs Simpson, Mrs Bailey and Mrs Demetrios were all told that it was too soon to talk about their children's future options. Mrs Simpson described her encounter with a Careers Adviser when James was 13:

*'I asked to see someone about careers a couple of years ago, because I was that worried about what he could do and she more or less said come back when he is a little older. I can't do anything yet. It seems to be the ongoing thing, you know, we will look at it soon but not just yet.'*

The school's assumption, that James would remain in the sixth form, led Mrs Simpson to comment that as far as she was concerned, the school had made the decision for them. They had received no information about the sixth form programme by May of James's final year, and when it came up at the annual review, Mrs Simpson was cross:

Mrs Simpson *When do we talk about what James is going to do in the sixth form?*

Deputy Head *Have you visited it? I wish we had a leaflet about it.*

Mrs Simpson *No – I don't know anything about the sixth form.*

Opportunities to think about and discuss the future were also regulated by the timing of the first transition planning meeting. Although the Code had recommended that the first meeting should be held when the pupil reached 14+, along with the statutory review of the statement, the schools exercised a good deal of flexibility in how they interpreted this guidance. While at Gavin's comprehensive school the staff did use the 14+ annual review to agree Key Stage 4 options alongside considering future destinations, Joyce Gray at Kylie and Stuart's comprehensive and each of the special schools waited until Years 10 or even 11 before any discussions of post-16 destinations or options were held. This was particularly so where, as described above, the school had an attached sixth form or where pupils traditionally moved onto residential specialist colleges at 16, as in the case of deaf or hearing-impaired students, and it is to assumptions made about post-school destinations that I now turn.

- *Destinations*

The Code recommended that the Careers Adviser must be invited to the 14+ review meeting to 'enable all options... to be given serious consideration'. In practice, as described above, staff tended to make assumptions about their pupils' destinations at 16+, relying on custom and practice. Special schools tended to assume, for example, that their pupils would progress on to the school sixth form when they reached Year 11 or, if they did not have a sixth form, to residential college. Mainstream schools assumed that pupils would move on to the local college. As a consequence, pupils experienced a further restriction of what was already a fairly limited choice as a result of staff attitudes, or in Hodgkinson's (1996) terms, a further limitation of their horizons for action.

The underlying explanations for this attitude are complex. As Lipsky suggests, it could be that professionals were managing their workload by restricting the information that was passed to parents and young people, thereby minimising the effort that needed to go into the decision-making process. The use of custom and practice in reducing the demands made by any decision-making process is also discussed in Chapter 2 (Mellers *et al.*, 1998). An alternative explanation could be that professionals were anxious to maximise the time young people remained in education

before having to cope with the uncertainty of the labour market and adult life. Professionals were in effect extending the transition period. As Sam Smiley, a Year 10 teacher at Marchmount School, explained:

*'You can only choose what is there. Things aren't in place for people like Malcolm. I mean you have a very limited choice and I think that is the reality really.'*

Like the teachers of both Kylie and Gavin, Sam was afraid that once Malcolm left the education system he would slip through the network of support. It is significant that each of these three pupils dropped out of school of their own accord and seemed likely to become excluded from the mainstream of society.

So it was assumed that, at Marchmount School, most pupils stayed in the Upper School until they were 17 or 18 years of age. Yet, as described in Chapter 4, both Malcolm and Costas and their parents went through prolonged periods of uncertainty about whether this was indeed the best option.

Joyce Gray provided a further example of how colleges can also make assumptions about pupil destinations. The school's local college used to offer Year 11 pupils a link course for one day a week where they were in-filled onto an existing Youth Training Scheme (YTS), although this was now no longer on offer due to the high charges levied by the college. The school and college had assumed that these same pupils would then go on to join the full-time YTS course, in the following year, when they left school. In this way, the college had created a ready-made market for itself.

At each of the three special schools for pupils with sensory or physical disabilities, there was an underlying assumption among staff that most of their pupils would go to residential colleges, while acknowledging the fact that students would need to visit local alternatives for the sake of official procedures. One of Ann James's three intentions for the review was to 'make the LEA aware of the student's possible intentions at this stage and that the student may well be looking to continue at an out-county placement'. So the likelihood was, from her point of view, that Andrew would go to a residential specialist college. However, at the Year 10 review, Andrew had said that he did not know whether he wanted to go to a deaf or hearing college, having

discovered the existence of local colleges during my interview with him, and Ann James noted afterwards, ‘An addition to the review to read that Andrew will be considering both mainstream and specialist colleges.’ Andrew had challenged the prevailing assumptions, although one is left wondering whether this would have happened had he not been involved in this study.

Of the five students attending each of these three schools, only the parents of one student, Sandra, challenged the school’s assumption that their daughter would go to a residential college but the cost of their disagreement meant that, three years after discussions had begun and two months before Sandra was due to leave school, nothing had been agreed. At Sandra’s first review meeting I attended, when she was in Year 11, Mrs Harding had gone with the expectation of raising a number of questions about Sandra’s future options but was to be disappointed.

- Deputy Head     *That’s where Jean Baxter (Careers Adviser) tells you about what will happen after that (the sixth form).*
- Teacher         *Shall I put ‘residential on a part-time basis’?*
- Mother          *We’re just wondering how long we’ve got left? We’re hoping she could stay for another couple of years.*
- Deputy Head     *You’ll get information about what happens after the sixth form.*
- Father          *We worry. What happens when she leaves school? We’ve got some ideas.*
- Deputy Head     *Have you spoken to Jean Baxter?*
- Mother          *No, Sandra had a fit on the careers day when we were due to come.*
- Deputy Head     *She’s usually here on consultation evenings.*
- Teacher         *She’s very involved with the students in the sixth form and will do home visits.*
- Deputy Head     *If you’re feeling anxious, say you want to see Jean Baxter at the consultation evening. She’s very knowledgeable. She’ll contact you after Sandra leaves school as well.*
- Mother          *We’d like a college near home.*
- Sandra          *I won’t run away. (Laughter)*
- Deputy Head     *I suppose Walgrave is the nearest (college).*
- Father          *Yes, but we don’t know whether it’s got facilities.*

Teacher                    *We normally make a note about going into the sixth (writing).*

This was the only discussion about Sandra's options on leaving school throughout the entire meeting. Mr and Mrs Harding had not known much about the sixth form prior to the meeting and did not know how long Sandra was allowed to stay, yet she was only two months away from the statutory school-leaving age. Although Sandra was about to enter the sixth form, her parents had not been given any information about the programme she would follow nor about how long she could remain there. While the deputy did suggest they might make an appointment to see the careers officer, it was clear that Mr and Mrs Harding wanted a more in-depth discussion than either the teacher or the deputy was prepared to allow during the meeting. No possibilities were aired (apart from the one local college) and Sandra's parents were told about an alternative procedure for seeing the Careers Adviser. Meanwhile, throughout this exchange, the teacher seemed anxious to move on, twice asking what she should record on the form rather than engaging with Mr and Mrs Harding's anxieties. Prior to the meeting, the teacher had already revealed to me that she thought this meeting was too soon to begin to discuss post-school options.

*'It would be nice to hear parents' views on life after St. Peter's, I think, but I'm not sure whether that review is the one to do it. I think they need to be taken quite gently into life after St. Peter's than having to face it abruptly this year. I very much hope that she will stay on into the sixth form. I think it would be a tragedy if she left school early so I suppose one of the things to ascertain is that she is going to stay in the sixth form.'*

Not only was this teacher making assumptions about what Sandra would do next, she was also making assumptions about Mr and Mrs Harding's needs. They were eager to talk about the longer term but were not given the chance to do so. Later in our discussion she admitted that the longer-term future of her pupils was something she preferred not to think about and it is likely that this teacher was protecting herself rather than the parents. Her preferred longer-term destination for Sandra was a residential specialist college because, 'she can start to have longer and longer periods of time without Mum and Dad because she is very, very dependent on them, obviously so I would like her to go to a college.'

The view that Sandra would be better off at a residential college was shared by Mrs Corby, the sixth form teacher describing Mr and Mrs Harding's views as 'Dickensian'. She believed that Sandra needed an opportunity to spend some time away from her parents. At the next review there was a more extended discussion about what Sandra would do when she left school and Mr and Mrs Harding reiterated the fact that they wanted Sandra to go to a local college. Since the last meeting, Sandra had had a serious seizure and this had confirmed to her parents that they wanted to be able to reach her quickly in such circumstances. There was a college in a neighbouring health authority, which she could travel to on a daily basis, which they had not been to visit, but instead they had talked to the mother of another child who went there and they liked the sound of it. The occupational therapist then suggested that arranging health support other than in the child's home district was very complex – it was much easier if students went to a residential college because the support services are automatically made available. In a later discussion I had with this therapist, she said that increasing numbers of young people wanted to go to their local college and this was having a knock-on effect in planning access to support services.

So, as well as the expectations of staff, Mr and Mrs Harding also faced assumptions made by the system about where students go when they leave school. From what the occupational therapist said it was clearly easier to obtain physiotherapy and occupational therapy support at a residential college because the systems were already in place to provide it. Local provision was much harder to arrange particularly where students were moving between health trusts.

In February of the following year, Sandra's final review meeting was held, which Mr Harding attended on his own. By this time Sandra and her parents had visited the college but Mr Harding was not happy after all because of the length of the journey, the lack of supervision at lunchtimes, the hilly nature of the site and the fact that all the other students on the course would be much older than Sandra. The occupational therapist again reiterated how difficult it was to arrange healthcare.

*'Getting access to therapy at Sedgewick will be very difficult to enable her to have the kind of programme she needs. It's not straightforward at Sedgewick. It's more*



*complicated going from the North Gladeshire service (in which the school was situated) to the East Gladeshire Service and living in South Gladeshire.'*

Her father agreed that it would be better to arrange therapy at their local centre and if it came to a choice between this and education he preferred to concentrate on Sandra's therapeutic needs. So, the Careers Adviser suggested that they try two other colleges closer to their home and she agreed to arrange a visit to Broadlands College. But this visit never materialised and it was only through chance as described in Chapter 6 that Sandra and her parents eventually found out about and visited the College.

Why, after three years of debate, was the decision about Sandra's post-school destination only resolved by chance? Why was it so difficult for Mr and Mrs Harding to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy? Mrs Harding's explanation was as follows:

*'...it didn't seem that the school knew anything about this college and what we were asking for. They had plenty of residential homes, loads of them, and it seems that we were a bit of a pain in the neck because we were a bit out of the norm... and they take it all over and because we wanted to keep her in our area. I think it might have been a bit difficult as well because we were... we would have liked to have known about a year ago of all the colleges that are in our area so that we could have had a lot to go to and have a look at. They did offer us to go and have a look at residential ones as I said, but that is what we weren't interested in, we didn't want that.'*

Clearly the teachers at Sandra's school believed that it would be best for her to leave home and, as I have already described, Mrs Harding was also concerned about her social isolation and the need for Sandra to have a peer group as well as the pressure on the family of having to care for Sandra full-time. Yet her parents were also committed to caring for Sandra for the rest of their lives. It seemed to me, looking from the outside, that none of the professionals involved had explored the dynamics of the family relationships or the dilemmas which Mrs Harding, in particular, faced. Sandra's parents were seen as having a single viewpoint yet there were in fact quite significant differences between them. As Mrs Harding said, the school was locked into a particular viewpoint from which it seemed unable to shift and this, combined

with the changes in careers service personnel, meant that Sandra and her family fell through the net.

Second, the school seemed to be unaware of what local opportunities existed. Although the school had organised a careers convention, only residential colleges had attended. It is only possible to speculate about the extent to which this lack of knowledge had worsened since colleges had become incorporated and left local authority control.

Third, there were systemic barriers to be overcome. Clearly the health and welfare of their daughter was very important to the Hardings. The difficulties triggered by moving outside the system placed her physical care in jeopardy but rather than giving into these pressures, Mr Harding decided to place healthcare above access to continuing education. When he did this, the professionals seemed to find it hard to know what to do next. Furthermore, there seemed to be a number of bilateral meetings which occurred – the Careers Advisers met with parents and pupils separately as did the school doctor – and it was not always clear how information from these meetings fed into the transition meeting nor how referrals would be made on to other agencies. Sue Stapleton, Sandra's teacher, confirmed this:

*'We always say there will be the careers officer who will be at our consultation evenings and we have these planning meetings in Year 12 and we will say that they will still carry on liaising etc. etc. but I get the impression that it's not that clear who does what.'*

Other services also appeared equally intransigent and unprepared to change to accommodate the introduction of transition planning meetings or to reconceptualise their roles.

In this section I have argued that, despite the introduction of the Code's guidance on transition planning, with its emphasis on participation, options and choice at 16, many professionals continued to rely on custom and practice to guide their responses. By delaying discussions about post-school options or by making assumptions about the next steps for their pupils the need for staff to engage in having to support students

and parents in making decisions was nullified. The corollary of this approach is that there is then no need to begin discussions about post-school options at 14+ because destinations are already clear. However, this wish to delay discussions can also arise from staff's own anxieties about the future of their pupils and their own lack of confidence in helping parents deal with the fact of their child's disability and the uncertainty of the future.

### *Going through the motions*

Another way of coping with change is to make the new procedures fit existing practices, to 'go through the motions' rather than undertaking the kind of wholesale changes to values and working practices that are often implied. One of the Code's major procedural innovations was the introduction of transition planning from 14+ onwards as part of the regular annual review process.

- *Managing meetings*

The Code provided guidance on who was to be invited, the production of a transition plan and what the plan should include. Yet most of the time in the 18 meetings I observed, particularly the earlier ones, was spent reviewing the statement rather than discussing transitional issues. An additional procedural change, which governed applications to specialist colleges, was ushered in by the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. All applications for placement at a specialist college had to be accompanied by evidence that a student's local sector college could not meet their needs. Responses to this innovation by staff could best be described as 'going through the motions'.

Some teachers struggled with trying to reconcile the dual objectives of the 14+ annual reviews and expressed their anxiety about how best to conduct these meetings. Ann James said:

*'To be honest with you, I don't know if I am doing the job right, I don't know what I should be doing in a way. I am not quite sure what the perfect chair of an annual review should do... I suppose I like to develop an atmosphere of informality in the hope that people will feel able to contribute as and when they would like to. I am very*

*aware of trying to lead people through a few documents making sure that everybody understood them and that everybody has agreed with what has been written... I am also aware that sometimes they don't say anything and so that is why I say is there something you want to add or do you feel happy with that.'*

Other teachers shared her anxieties and after two such meetings the Chairs asked me to give them some feedback on their conduct of the meetings.

One of the problems for those managing the meetings was the multiple agendas that individuals brought with them. Participants from 12 of the meetings I attended were asked to comment in retrospect on what they had hoped would be achieved and then what they thought was actually decided. A detailed breakdown of their responses is given in Appendix 18. The outcomes reveal some interesting differences in perceptions about the role and purposes of such meetings. In the following analysis 'short term' is used to mean within the next 12 months; 'medium term' to denote the next step on leaving school; and 'long term' meaning any time thereafter.

All the teachers who responded (14 teachers, heads and deputies) saw the meetings as an opportunity to review pupil progress and the pupil's statement and to agree short-term targets. The emphasis placed on medium-term planning depended on staff assumptions as to whether the student would be leaving school at the end of the current or subsequent year. However, a few (five) also saw these occasions as an opportunity to pass on information to parents about the curriculum their child would be following and about procedures for choosing post-school placements. In general then, the emphasis was mainly on the curriculum and the immediate future. Not surprisingly, the four Careers Advisers who responded were each more concerned with exploring the student's medium or longer-term plans as was the occupational therapist. Apart from Mrs Lewis, who felt the school set the agenda, parental expectations were mixed with most of them wanting more information about their child's progress, the curriculum and post-school options or procedures.

Respondents were also asked to comment on what they thought the meetings had achieved and this highlighted some important tensions. Five parents out of 11 respondents expressed disappointment with the outcomes of the meetings as opposed

to only three out of a possible 24 sets of comments from professionals. Parents used phrases such as ‘disappointed’, ‘very vague’, ‘no change, no decisions’.

An occupational therapist noted that only short-term plans had been made rather than the longer-term plan she had envisaged, writing that, ‘The reviews are not fulfilling a useful purpose’, while Maria’s teacher and classroom assistant both felt that Maria’s review was so dominated by her social worker’s agenda that no one else had had a chance to contribute. In these two instances, then, there were tensions between professionals about the purpose of the meetings.

Sometimes, however, there were differences between parents and professionals. Bill Francis had gone to David’s review expecting to find out about which residential college David might go to and the funding arrangements. He had already made up his mind about where he wanted David to go and was convinced that there was no point in discussing local provision. On the other hand Ann James, the Careers Adviser and the LEA SEN Officer all felt that the purpose of this particular review was only to begin to explore post-16 possibilities including local opportunities. The Careers Adviser wrote:

*‘I would not expect any decisions to be made as I do not feel this is the appropriate venue for making decisions but an opportunity to highlight issues which need further discussion and subsequently decisions. The review is one part of the decision-making process.’*

What is significant here is the failure of many teaching staff to have reconceptualised the purpose of these 14+ review meetings and the impact that transition planning ought to have on both their purpose and conduct. Instead, they generally focussed on short-term educational targets. It was not until the penultimate or final reviews that much attention was paid to transitional issues. Furthermore, there was no recognition by staff of the different expectations of participants and the impact that this was likely to have on the value of the meetings.

Sometimes these meetings touched on difficult or sensitive issues, which were opened up for discussion but then avoided. Two teachers expressed their concerns about this.

Lucy Smith, Gavin's support teacher, felt pleased about the conduct of his review meeting as everyone had had a chance to contribute including Gavin. Yet she questioned the value of some annual reviews, believing that most did little more than offer a formal recognition of the statement review. Mel Grant, a teacher at Marchmount School, agreed. After one of Kim's reviews he shared his concerns that Mr and Mrs Doyle felt unhappy with the school but that such meetings did not allow conflicts to emerge, despite the fact that everyone was given an opportunity to speak.

Why was this? Perhaps such meetings are an inappropriate forum for supporting young people and their parents, a conclusion reached by Tisdall (1996) in her cross-cultural study of transition planning meetings in Scotland and Canada in which she pointed out that such meetings succeeded only in allowing professionals to fulfil their procedural obligations. Certainly some staff in this study were reluctant to open meetings up to the kind of problem solving envisaged by Lucy and Mel. The following two extracts from meetings I attended illustrate their concerns as well as those of Tisdall.

The first instance concerns Andrew who had not met his Careers Adviser until his final review in Year 11. He was uncertain about the course he wanted to take.

- Careers Adviser     *I want him to understand the route into becoming an electrician. If, for example, he did a GNVQ Intermediate in engineering the next step would be a Modern Apprenticeship working with an employer to get an NVQ. He needs to bring his grades up to four GCSE grades A to C.*
- Teacher             *If he did the GNVQ would this be a better basis?*
- Careers Adviser     *It's difficult. He needs to bring his qualifications up to what is required.*
- Teacher             *Would this improve his employability skills?*
- Careers Adviser     *Yes, because he's done a more relevant course. JT Ltd. would deliver the training. If he wants to be an electrician, that's the way to go.*
- Teacher             *(signing to Andrew)     Do you know definitely that's what you want to do?*

Andrew                    *(through the communicator) I want to do that.*

Teacher                   *What, next September?*

Andrew                   *I want to do engineering training.*

Teacher                   *I want you to accept the place and tell them that you want to choose the engineering course. It's your choice, you decide. If it doesn't work, you can change your mind. Is that what you want?*

Andrew                   *Yes.*

Teacher                   *Right. Brilliant...*

Careers Adviser        *We've got a big form to fill in.*

Later in the meeting, however, it became clear that Andrew did not understand the term GNVQ nor whether this was the same as the engineering course he had agreed he wanted to do. His parents were also concerned that his options would become closed too soon. This was clearly not an appropriate forum in which to ask questions and explore options yet both the Careers Adviser and the teacher seemed eager to bring about some form of quick resolution and complete the paperwork.

The second example concerns the issue of Kim and her independent travel. Much of the three meetings I observed were taken up with this topic and it was a complex problem for everyone to cope with, including her teachers and her parents. Mrs Doyle raised the problem at Kim's Year 12 meeting and referred to her own experiences in the Kings Cross fire. The Careers Adviser replied:

*Is it something she can work on? A little bit at first, find a safe place to cross just in the immediate area. Next year she's going to college on her own. By the time she leaves school she will have to travel if she's to work. Even college progression to the next level course expects them to travel independently.*

Chair                    *I think we're jumping too far ahead. We're working on other things.*

This illustrates the longer-term concerns of the careers officer and possibly the reluctance of the deputy head teacher to open up the discussion about the relationship

between the family's unwillingness to give her more independence and Kim's future prospects. However Mel, Kim's teacher, reopened the discussion almost immediately.

- Teacher        *We've referred Kim to the Community Health Team – it's an interdisciplinary team. They will work with you all.*
- Mrs Doyle      *When she's due to go out she tells me a few days beforehand. I know she's very nervy. We try to overcome it.*
- Mr Doyle       *They will advise us as well. We don't know how to approach it.*
- Mel              *The psychiatrist says it's a very difficult problem. She warned me not to be too teacherly. She wants to focus on what she's achieved.*
- Chair            *Next year what college courses will you do?*

Again the deputy head changes the subject and this time succeeds in redirecting the course of the meeting.

Despite his misgivings about the value of some transition planning meetings, Mel was also the most enthusiastic teacher I interviewed about them. He believed the meetings had finally provided him with a focus for his role as leaver's teacher so that, using Ball's (1994) definition of policy implementation, Mel's interpretation of the Code's guidance fitted with his personal beliefs, experiences, skills and context. As far as he was concerned the Code of Practice had provided a framework within which he could now operate. In other words, the Code had confirmed how he believed he should be working. The local authority had provided some training on different models of transition meetings which he believed should be the 'pinnacle' of their work, for it was at these meetings that professionals, parents and young people could all meet face-to-face and listen to one another's opinions. Whereas he believed that, for parents, the most important aspect of the meetings was the process, for professionals it was the production of completed forms. This was borne out by a number of meetings I observed in which the completion of forms seemed to take precedence over the exploration of issues, as illustrated above. Mel also saw such meetings as a chance for some parents to hear what their child wanted to do. Finally, he saw them as a kind of rite of passage for some families, particularly where a child had been at the school for many years, describing how at a recent meeting they had all sat and cried together as they prepared for the pupil to leave school.



- *Ritualising*

Another way of ‘going through the motions’ was by making procedures into a ritual or routine. An example of this was the funding applications for specialist residential college placements. The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act had introduced a new system for funding placements at non-maintained colleges for students who were no longer the subject of a Statement of Special Educational Needs (otherwise they remained the responsibility of the LEA until they were 19 if they wished to remain in education). The procedure was based on three criteria. First, that facilities available within the maintained further and higher education sectors could not meet the needs of the students; second, that it is in the student’s best interests to attend a non-maintained college; and, third, that the student is aged between 16 and 25. Any application to a residential college had to be accompanied by a statement from the applicant’s local college stating that they could not meet the student’s needs, which was subsequently altered to two such statements.

This policy was partly driven by the Further Education Funding Council’s (FEFC) wish to increase local opportunities but also to reduce spending on specialist college placements. Yet, since this policy had been introduced, the numbers of students going to residential specialist colleges remained constant. For example, figures from the FEFC show no significant fall in the numbers of students attending residential colleges between 1996/7 when the number stood at 2,062, 1997/8 with 2,034 and 2,051 for 1998/9. Why did the policy not have the desired effect? The answer may well lie in the extent to which professionals presented these procedures as a ritual rather than a genuine exploration of alternatives.

This was most obvious in the cases of Andrew, David and James where, apart from Andrew, everyone involved was clear that they preferred the specialist college option. Sometimes the funding application procedures led to a feeling of solidarity among the decision-makers, as I described in Chapter 4 when Ann James invoked the language of warfare in describing the process of applying for a residential college placement, while Sue Stapleton, James’s teacher, saw the key to success as saying ‘the right

thing' on the forms. Parents and students were bemused by the process, while everyone worried that funding would not be made available.

The need for James to visit local as well as residential colleges was first mentioned at his penultimate annual review and transition planning meeting but this was not followed up until February of his final year. By that time, James had already visited two residential colleges and had made his choice. Mr and Mrs Simpson were surprised then to learn at James's final review in February that they and James had to make a series of visits to local colleges. The Careers Adviser sounded rather anxious as she explained the procedure.

*'Until James has visited the local colleges, I don't feel there's any more I can add. I'll chase Broadlands. If the local colleges say yes, do you still want to push the case (for a residential college)? It depends on the strength of the case. I would put the case to the out-county panel and if they offer support, if I can give strong educational reasons, bearing in mind what the colleges say, of course...'*

It appeared that the school had proceeded as if the visits to local colleges had no real significance but the Careers Adviser (who had not been present at previous meetings) was anxious that everything must be conducted properly. Describing the process afterwards Mrs Simpson was perplexed.

*'I thought it all seemed a bit funny – Jean Baxter seemed to be pushing us to go to more than one college, didn't she? She said, "You'll have to go to Broadlands, you'll have to go to Beechcroft, you must go to another one as well," and I thought, gosh, that's three colleges we have got to go to locally to look at.'*

So they visited two colleges but still had not heard from Broadlands.

*'All this time I kept saying, well what about Broadlands and she kept saying, "Well you know I have sent him a letter, I have done this, I have done that," and we never heard anything. And then finally this man rang me up and said, "Oh look, I have just found this letter from Jean Baxter about James" and he said that this was our local college. He said come and look round yourself but don't bring James because we*

*can't get him in. The computers are up on the third floor and there's no lift but for form's sake you had better come and have a look, and then I'll do you a letter saying that we can't ...take him.'*

It was clear, then, that in this case the college's learning support co-ordinator also saw these procedures as hoops to be jumped through and a waste of time. However, college staff sometimes found themselves under pressure to agree to reject a student when in their view the college was able to meet the student's needs. This same co-ordinator at Broadlands College felt the College could meet David's needs and refused to write a letter saying otherwise until Bill Francis threatened to physically attack him. Both the school and Mr Francis had interpreted the procedures as a ritual and any challenge to this interpretation was met with resistance and, in this instance, a threat of violence!

While the intention of the FEFC to increase local opportunities was laudable, there was little evidence to suggest that the procedures they had adopted had done anything to challenge the status quo but instead merely served to increase the anxiety of parents and students and maintain the entrenched practices of schools. The cumbersome and bureaucratic nature of the procedures failed to address the prevailing assumptions of many professionals, particularly where it was perfectly obvious from the outset that local colleges did not have suitable provision available. Colleges were also failing to change their practices by, for example, making appropriate interview arrangements or ensuring that college representatives attended transition reviews or careers events. Since the process also had not had the desired effect on the numbers of students attending residential colleges, the proposed changes to this particular procedure are welcome. In the language of Ann James, the 'battle has been won'. The question remains as to whether the new Learning and Skills Council can bring about the underlying changes in attitude needed to administer the revised procedures.

#### *Questioning current practice*

There were signs during the course of the three years of this project that staff were beginning to question some of their underlying assumptions. At St. Peter's School attitudes of staff began to change although it is difficult to ascertain whether this was due to instructions issued by the local authority or an interim report, which I had

prepared at their request (see Appendix 19) or a combination of the two. In any case the deputy head, acknowledging the helpfulness of my report, said he felt discussions with young people and their parents should start sooner rather than later, and that, while no decisions about post-school destinations were being made at 14+, such meetings were an opportunity to begin to share information. How far his change of attitude influenced the school's subsequent practice was outside the scope of this particular project.

The outcomes of transition planning meetings should be recorded on a proforma and then used to inform the student's programme of work throughout the next and subsequent years but doubts were expressed by some staff about the effectiveness of these plans. Freda at Marchmount School admitted to never having looked at the forms but Sue Stapleton at St. Peter's reflected on the inadequacies of their current practice.

*'I think one of the problems, certainly this year, was that we changed what we were doing in the sixth form. We didn't know until almost the last week of the summer term at this time last year what we were actually going to be offering the students. So that made it very difficult, so that they got very innocuous comments as targets put on to their Year 11 statement reviews. We just did not know what we were going to be doing. So that made it doubly difficult. I think what we need is to actually start the planning post-St. Peter's earlier, so that we are actually coming into the sixth form with much clearer targets about what we do over the whole two years rather than just leaving it to Year 12 to decide at that point what is happening. It doesn't often happen, but occasionally, as we are having this year, we suddenly get a year 10 student who has got a bit more about them and they suddenly find, "Oh, you don't have to stay." We have one student down here who says, "I am going to leave at 16." We don't really have a good mechanism for picking that up easily, so we are doing a bit of firefighting to get that sorted out. That's why I am saying that for everybody it ought to start earlier, so that we can actually be thinking much more clearly about what's going to happen. The implications if you make this choice. For instance, if you make a choice to go to a mainstream college placement you have then got to sort your own therapy out and all those things. It's very late on in the day for Year 12 to suddenly be facing parents and students with the implications of what choices are*

*going to be. We ought to do it much earlier. I don't think it would have a big impact on the curriculum for Key Stage 4, but I think what we would get is better thinking about what's needed in the sixth form.'*

It is clear from this statement that Sue and her colleagues were rethinking, not only the relationship between the statement review and transition planning, but also the organisational and curricular implications for the school of offering genuine options to students at 14+ rather than making assumptions about their progression routes at 16. So, while there was certainly some evidence to suggest that professionals were clinging to their traditional ways of working and reconceptualising the Code's intentions by 'domesticating' or 'ritualising' the new procedures, it was also clear that some professionals were beginning to question their current ways of working.

It is not easy for staff to challenge the prevailing status quo, however. Exploring Costas' story from the perspective of his teacher, Sam, illustrates just how difficult it was. Sam agreed with Mr and Mrs Demetrios that Costas was probably not in the correct kind of school for his needs and that some alternative placement might be preferable. He felt that Costas would have managed in a mainstream secondary school had he been given sufficient support and thought that he should probably move into a mainstream setting at 16. Sam perceived employers and other education and training providers as holding negative attitudes towards pupils from special schools, often failing to see pupils' potential.

*'I don't think we think about those things enough really in a sense, because I have always thought, this is just a personal view, this kid is going to leave school, it would be best for him if he left from a big school rather than a special school. In his personal file or his history he is not leaving from a special school... I think this gives a different sort of feel when you ask...'*

Sam went on to describe how he felt their local college also labelled those pupils leaving special schools by assuming that they would join separate, rather than mainstream, link programmes and from there continuing onto specially designed full-time courses. He considered that students leaving his school were consigned to the conveyor belt of special programmes while knowing, for instance, that Costas was

capable of more. 'They tend to put them into a slot.' Here then, Sam was concerned that college staff did much the same as some school staff by narrowing options and choices based on assumptions. Yet none of these ideas were shared at the review meetings or recorded, and, at his Year 11 review, the deputy head teacher said that it would be better if Costas stayed at school so that 'we can keep an eye on him'. It was also clear that his Year 11 teacher did not share Sam's view of Costas' capabilities.

*'One of the things that I find in the classroom in school and at college is that he finds it very difficult to behave appropriately in situations. So it's part of social experience of how you cope with being in the canteen not just sort of messing about... these social things are very important for Costas to learn this year.'*

#### *Between a rock and a hard place*

Implementing new policies generally means that professionals have to change the ways in which they work. Sometimes policies may conflict with each other and changes can act to the detriment of traditional roles, as Ann James described in relation to Careers Advisers, who were in her view having to sacrifice their advice and guidance role to meet targets and complete the paperwork. Careers services are required to be invited to transitional reviews under Regulation 16(3) of the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations 1994. But in 1996, having been previously managed by local authorities, careers services were privatised. Although these private providers had a contractual obligation to continue to meet the needs of young people with special educational needs, many providers insisted on a narrow interpretation of their obligations and specialist Careers Advisers were expected, like their mainstream colleagues, to complete a prescribed number of action plans within a particular timeframe. This gave rise to the unlooked for outcome that some Careers Advisers avoided spending time with those clients who were likely to take up excessive amounts of time, including those with complex special educational needs. This could help to explain the issue identified by Ann James. As a residential school, the staff had to accommodate the practices of many different local authorities and careers services who often had to travel considerable distances to attend review meetings.

*'I think they (the career services) are trying to take short cuts in the Code of Practice in a way. I can understand because it's so horrific, you know, the workload is*

*horrendous. People can't cope with the workload... and don't know how to do it all. So I can understand that people want to make short cuts and naturally want to try and revise it. But from my point of view, the transitional review is supposed to be a really important document. Gladeshire in particular has said that the transitional review has to be done in Year 9, whereas previously everyone had decided that Year 10 was most appropriate.'*

Here, Ann acknowledges that professionals have reinterpreted the Code's guidance, in this case the timing of the first transitional planning meeting, to accommodate their work pressures arising, she believes, from the Code. Despite the local authority's decision, however, the careers service covering Gladeshire were only planning to attend transition planning meetings from Year 10 while other careers services did not attend at all but relied on the local services to cover their clients. She went on to assert that some Careers Advisers had reinterpreted their roles as being purely administrative, only dealing with the paperwork involved in making applications for residential placements. Ann was not alone in her wish to have increased involvement by the careers service. Both Sue Stapleton and Linda Jones from St. Peter's School wanted their involvement in transition planning meetings in Years 10 and 11.

The involvement of Social Services in transition planning is governed, to the extent to which it has been enacted, by the 1986 Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act. Under this Act LEAs are required to notify Social Services of the expected date of leaving full-time education of all statemented pupils. Social Services are then required to conduct an assessment at 14+ of the child's likely future care needs. In practice this rarely happens. None of the families I met in Gladeshire had had regular contact with a social worker although Mrs Harding described theirs as a 'real old battleaxe' who had insisted that Sandra could do more for herself than everyone was pretending. Certainly none of the pupils had undergone an assessment at 14+. Having said that, sometimes families did receive correspondence from Social Services related to assessments, which they did not understand as described in Chapter 6. In the London Borough things were rather better and, where Social Services were likely to be involved with the young person after school, a member of the adult team attended review meetings to ensure a smooth transfer of responsibility.

Thus there was some evidence to suggest that some support service personnel were modifying the clients whom they were prepared to work with as a way of coping with the effects of competing policies and priorities. There was sometimes a conflict between policies governing how services were expected to work and the Code's guidance on transition planning, the net effect being that some young people and their parents did not receive adequate or timely support.

### **Commentary**

The influence of professionals was exercised not only through their perceptions of the young people and their families' needs but also through their responses to and interpretation of policies and procedures, which were inextricably linked to their personal agendas. Four types of response by professionals to the Code's guidance were identified: no changes, continuing to rely on custom and practice; a 'domestication' or accommodation of the procedures but without challenging underlying assumptions; questioning of previous practice with a view to making changes; changes to practice but in ways not envisaged by the Code due to conflicting policies, excessive workloads or shortage of resources.

Lipsky suggests that to counter the apparent power and influence of professionals in realising policies, checks and balances in the system are needed. These can operate at four levels: organisationally, legally, professionally and through giving more control to consumers. The most obvious pressure point in the transition process is through the latter but despite the espoused principles of parental and student involvement set out in the Code of Practice their influence in most of these case studies, particularly of students, was marginal. The voices of parents and students were often not really listened to.

In the Code some mention is made in passing of the need for parents to have access to independent advisers but little has been done. Yet this is exactly what the parents in this study said they wanted – someone whom they felt was working for them rather than them having to try to work to other agendas. But what about the students? Their views and wishes were often subsumed by both parents and professionals. So they too needed advocates. The proposed new Connexions Service will use Personal Advisers to support young people, particularly those considered to be 'at risk', and this will



include pupils with special educational needs. At the time of writing the roles of these Personal Advisers have not been worked out, particularly in relation to parents. Will they act as one of the checks and balances? This will, of course, depend on their status and the extent to which other services accept their role as independent.

In listening and talking to the professionals in this study I was struck by their lack of awareness of the power that they wielded, and yet how relatively powerless many parents and young people were in the process. This power flowed partly from the status attached to their roles as teacher, social worker, therapist etc. but also from the systems within which they operated and it is to this concept that I will return in my final chapter. Before doing so, however, I turn now to the influence of time.

## Chapter 8

### Time and its Influence

#### Introduction

So far in this study I have argued that during the transition from school the key players are involved in three essentially different processes. Using Brannen's (1996) term, the young people are engaged in becoming young men and women. Parents are involved in coping, among other things, with the uncertainty of their child's future life as an adult while professionals are essentially involved in responding to their own needs as professionals, the demands of young people and parents, and the implementation of national policies. What characterises each of these processes is their dependence on the passage of time – we move towards adulthood over time; how individuals respond to and cope with stress and anxiety develops and changes over time; responding to and accommodating policy changes takes time (Fullan with Stielgelbauer, 1991). Yet Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) argue that it is this dimension of decision-making that has been largely neglected – most commentators see school leaving as a single point in time rather than one step in an individual's total life span. By following the events that occurred over the course of the three years of this study I was able to catch a glimpse of how time influenced some of the decision-making processes during a small part of the total life course of these young people.

As Giddens (1984) has argued, the 'manipulation' of time is a way of imposing discipline on our lives either officially, through, for example, imposing a school leaving age or retirement date, or unofficially and at a personal level, by constructing ideas about time based on individual experiences or needs. Sometimes individuals experience feelings of being beyond the normal structures or constraints of official time when they are on holiday or when they enter new time frames such as time spent in hospital during periods of illness. Alheit (1994, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) provides an example of the construction of personal time frames in his study of the unemployed who, he argues, develop their own time frames because they are no longer subject to the time constraints of the official working day. They deconstruct time to allow them to get by

in the most comfortable manner possible, thus creating in their lives what he terms a 'biographical discontinuity', that is their personal time becomes separated from official time so that while official time continues to run, the unemployed enter a world of timelessness.

During the transition from school, time is manipulated formally through the legislation which governs when and how procedures will occur. The main conduit for these procedures is the professionals whose job it is to interpret the guidance. Sometimes their interpretations can differ which can bring them into conflict not only with other professionals but with the needs of the parents or young people the procedures are designed to support. In this section I argue that parents' perceptions of time differed from those of many professionals which led to misunderstandings and needs not being met. Yet, as I described in Chapter 4, decision-making is a messy and unpredictable business and part of this messiness arises from the natural course of events that govern our lives and the responses we have to those events. Thus, I also argue that outside the legal framework which governs school leaving, informal or chance events often provided young people or their parents with an alternative means to assert their opinions. These events became the excuse they were looking for.

In the subsequent sections I explore the legal or official markers of time which govern the period of time in question and how the different players in the process perceived time and the effect of these differences in perception on events. Finally, I explore a model for understanding the influence of the course of informal events and how the ways in which individuals responded to these events influenced the outcomes of the decision-making process.

### **Procedural markers**

As McGinty and Fish (1992) point out, transition is both a social-psychological process, explored here in the previous three chapters, as well as a period of time, which is broken up administratively and educationally. The law uses age as a delineation of both individual entitlement and the duties and powers of agencies. While the statutory school-leaving age is set at 16, under the 1944 Education Act young people with Statements of Special Educational Needs are entitled to remain in

education up to the age of 19. Although modified in subsequent legislation, the duties listed under section 41 para. 8 of the Act remain intact:

*'In exercising their functions under this section a local authority shall also have regard to the requirements of persons over compulsory school age who have learning difficulties.'*

Therefore, at 16, a young person with identified special educational needs can either stay on at school, in which case they remain the responsibility of the LEA, or, if they leave school, they will become the responsibility of a different service or phase of education. However, once they have left the school sector, their statement no longer has any status in law.

Under the 1986 Disabled Persons (and Services) Act, Social Services are required to conduct an assessment of needs at 14+ of any child with a statement to identify whether they will continue to qualify as disabled when they leave full-time education. Responsibility for the provision of services transfers from child to adult Social Services once the young person reaches the age of 18. More recently, under Section 140 of the 2000 Learning and Skills Act, provision is made for an additional assessment to be carried out by the Connexions Service in their final year of schooling.

There is a further welter of regulations governing entitlement to benefits and transport although while the former are governed by age, in law the latter is not. In practice, however, age does become an important factor in the provision of transport post-school which in turn can have a profound effect on what opportunities are open to some young people. Regulations governing transport arrangements in relation to accessing education for children and young people are laid down by the 1944 Education Act and rest on the phrase, 'as they (LEAs) consider necessary'. The term 'necessary' is open to interpretation and has consequently become a bone of contention between some LEAs, parents, colleges and Social Services. Social Services are empowered by the 1948 National Assistance Act to make transport available to promote the welfare of people over the age of 18 with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities and thus, according to Beachcroft Stanley (1996), there

is no reason why this should not include travel to education. Some Social Services departments, however, do not agree.

Finally, there are other markers, again laid down by law, which signal an official recognition of an individual's adult status, each of which are linked to age. These include the legal ages for heterosexual sexual relationships and marriage (16), obtaining a driving licence (17) and voting (18). These, too, bring with them their own challenges and poignancy for many families of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as they compare their child with special educational needs to their other children or those of their family and friends.

### **Perceptions and uses of time**

#### *Concepts of future: beyond the school gate*

Despite the apparently fixed nature of these legislative markers which divided up the passage of time, individuals as well as different agencies displayed considerable flexibility in how they interpreted the law and in the accommodations that they made to fit their particular perspective or needs. Conflicts arose because schools, parents and some pupils made different assumptions about the age at which the young person would leave school. For example, some parents were ignorant of the fact that their child with special educational needs could stay on at their special school's FE unit until they were 19, while teachers assumed both that parents were aware of the unit and that that was the pupil's destination.

These assumptions made by staff about placements and described more fully in Chapter 7, led to disputes about how soon transition planning should begin. None of the schools in the study (apart from one comprehensive) agreed with the procedural expectation that the first transition planning meeting would take place at 14+ (now amended to Year 9). Teachers were unanimous that this was too early to start discussions but this did not match with the needs of at least four sets of parents who all said that they had asked for information but had been told it was too early. Mrs Simpson said:

*'I sort of started when James was about 13 saying, "Come on, what's going to happen next?" And we kept getting, "Well, this could happen or that could happen,*

*but we won't talk about it yet, we'll talk about it next year." And it just seemed as if the years were trundling by and we weren't doing anything.'*

The choice of 13 as the age when this mother would have liked to begin discussions coincides with the now official view that Year 9 is the preferred time. In Chapter 7, I suggested that delaying talks about post-school options was one way in which professionals tried to control demands on their time or that the delay sprang from concerns about their own competence in dealing with the fears of parents. There may, however, be a third explanation which is that parents and professionals did not have a shared perception of time. Parents viewed their responsibility as stretching into infinity, because they naturally felt a lifelong responsibility for their child. As Mr Hussein commented when describing his fears for Nasreen's safety, 'I suddenly saw her as an old lady.' For teachers in particular their responsibilities, as one occupational therapist put it, 'stopped at the school gate'. Consequently, from the school's perspective there was only one decision to be made – where next? For parents, the decisions were more complex and far-reaching and in their eyes would take much longer to consider.

The other official and age-related markers described above that signal society's expectations of adulthood can also trigger in parents new anxieties and worries as they consider the future and they compare their child to others. Like their older siblings, Costas and Malcolm both wanted to learn to drive but their parents felt that this would be impossible for them. Mr Simpson wanted advice on how best to support James in his sexual development as a physically disabled man while Bill Francis needed some help in supporting David in his concerns about his sexuality. Nasreen was also anxious as she contemplated the expectations of her family and community that she would marry and have children. Mr Hardy compared his expectation that his son John would marry and leave home with his expectation that Sandra would never experience a sexual relationship or marry.

*'...our son goes to work and comes home everyday until he gets married and leaves. But see, Sandra won't ever have that either, not at the moment she won't have it because I don't think she can develop that way. Ummm... have that sort of*

*responsibility so we see it developing more here in the family with her friends around her.'*

So, in general, these procedural and societal 'manipulations of time' took on an added significance and importance for these families and their children, adding to levels of stress and anxiety. Legislation which existed to support young people was not well understood by parents and they were largely dependent on professionals to interpret and communicate this to them which, as I have argued, depended on the latter's own concepts and uses of time. Traditional rites of passage such as having boyfriends or girlfriends, learning to drive, getting married which seemed denied to their children only served to emphasise for some parents the uncertainty of the future and their lifelong dependency.

*Concepts of future: what do you want to be when you grow up?*

Helping young people to grasp that changes will occur is an essential aspect of preparing young people to leave school and to engage with the process of 'becoming' an adult. One of the most common ways of helping children to begin to think about him or herself as an adult is to ask, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' While this question is addressed to most children and young people by those around them, it is rarely asked of children with special educational needs and particularly those with learning difficulties. Several young people in this study had difficulties in responding to my question, what do you want to do in the future or what do you want to do when you leave school? Most found it easier to talk about their dreams or fantasies, e.g. 'to live in a big house in Enfield with a garden and a dog' (Malcolm); 'to be famous, to be a film star' (Andrew); 'what I really what is a girlfriend' (Costas); 'to be a psychologist and live in a house on the edge of a town near enough to the country and the town' (Nasreen). Others found this question difficult. Neither Kim nor Sandra fully understood the implications of my question although both of them understood that some kind of change was implied, hence Sandra said that she would miss her mother and father and Kim that she wanted to work in an office and could think of nothing that would prevent her from doing so.

However, both Maria's level of cognition and her communication skills prevented her from demonstrating whether she had any understanding of the fact that she would

have to leave school and this presented an enormous challenge to those responsible for helping her to prepare for the transition. After Mrs Constandis had made the decision to remove Maria from school and send her to a residential home 200 miles away, there was just three weeks in which to prepare Maria for this change in her circumstances. Maria's teacher, Carol Smithers, who knew nothing of these plans, was dismayed to find that Maria was deprived of participating in any of the rituals of leaving school or preparing for the next stage in her life. Furthermore, Maria was not able to be supported in taking part in that most fundamental of human acts: saying goodbye.

*'There was little time to prepare her or ourselves. She went and stayed just one weekend and the people from there came and spent a day with us... It was so abrupt. The Thursday before she was due to leave she was howling and howling. What could we do? She does have an understanding – her feelings could have been explored.'*

It is too easy to assume that because students cannot communicate their thoughts and feelings that they do not remember the past or cannot anticipate the future.

#### *Perceptions of time: benefits and constraints*

Parents and teachers saw time as both a benefit and a constraint, which sometimes led to internal conflicts and apparently contradictory viewpoints. Time was seen both as a means of curing or healing their child's learning difficulties and as a means of delaying entry into the post-school world. Looked at from the other point of view, time was also seen as a constraint in terms of the length of time a pupil had left at school, with parents feeling as if time was running out. Parents worried too about their own life spans and who would care for their children when they became too old or died.

Time seen as a means of healing or resolving their child's learning difficulties was particularly noticeable among parents of children with moderate learning difficulties. Russell (1986), herself a parent of a disabled son, describes how some parents, particularly those with a child with a mild or moderate disability, will deny the existence of a problem and instead will search for alternative diagnoses and treatments. Certainly the parents of both Costas and Michael had tried to find



alternative reasons for their difficulties and felt that their child's current schooling was inappropriate to their needs. Here are Mr and Mrs Lewis describing Malcolm's progress:

Mrs Lewis     *He was reading before he went there (his current school).*

Mr Lewis      *Yeah, at St. Anne's (the primary school).*

Mrs Lewis     *Yeah, definitely. Than what he's doing now. In the four years I don't think he's improved a lot.*

Mr Lewis      *This is what Mum means, that sort of school for Malcolm is a little bit too...*

Mrs Lewis     *Yeah, I think it does hold him back. We've said this before.*

However, they hoped he would change when he joined the Upper School. Mr and Mrs Demetrios shared this anticipation that their son would change. His father said:

*'The older he gets the more he seems to take in and we think another year will do the trick, just give him a little more experience because he picks up a paper now and actually starts reading stuff from the paper... Rather than put him out to work now could retard him a little bit for getting him about altogether and waiting another year, he will mature a little bit more and will be wiser.'*

Mr Doyle was more optimistic than Mrs Doyle that time would help to overcome Kim's difficulties. Mrs Doyle thought that Kim's aspiration to work on computers was unrealistic. She had been on a visit to a local training scheme and had found out what was involved but Mr Doyle thought that, given time, Kim might be able to develop the necessary skills.

*'You can say that, but then in three years time it may not. It's hard to judge because, as you know, you are developing, aren't you? She's 16 now, but (she's) developing. It's hard to tell what will happen in three years.'*

Like several other parents, Mr Doyle had been worried about time running out or time acting as a constraint.

*'I was delighted with the three years. Because I had my mind geared into 16 or 17 and that would have been a nightmare.'*

Mrs Harding felt the two years that Sandra would have in the sixth form would go very quickly:

*'She's only going to be there two years and that's going to go very quickly and what's going to happen after that? Can she go to a day centre – will it be one of those where they just sit and do nothing all day? It's all such a worry...'*

So, while some parents debated whether it was worthwhile for their child to stay at school, hoping that if they did so time would 'heal' their learning difficulties, others faced each potential leaving date with fear only to discover that some extension was possible. Indeed, the aim of several parents and teachers was to find ways of optimising the length of time the young people could spend in education by staying at school until 19 and then going on to college for two or three more years followed, perhaps, by a training scheme or another college placement. For instance, Mr Simpson, James's father, saw the visits to local colleges as useful in gathering information about post-college options for his son so that James would have somewhere to go when he left his residential college. The gradual extension of the period of transition between adolescence and adulthood as experienced by all young people is a phenomenon that has been noted by many commentators in recent years and is described in Chapter 1. Many more young people now remain dependent on their families for longer periods of time thereby delaying both their economic and, consequently, their personal independence. Compared to the young people in the studies of Walker (1982) and Anderson and Clark (1982), those in my research at least had access to continued education and training opportunities although, as others have noted, the relevance of some of this education and training to the lives of the young people leaves much to be desired (Corbett & Barton, 1992a; Riddell, 1993; FEFC, 1996).

Because Maria's condition was degenerative, time as a constraint was fundamental to the way in which Maria's mother construed her experiences. Aware of her daughter's prognosis, Mrs Constandis worried constantly about the time that was lost when, for

example, professionals failed to read reports. This meant that in the eyes of Mrs Constandis valuable time was lost in repeating programmes rather than building on Maria's previous achievements.

*'The bad thing about the school which I have found out, they do not read the previous year's report which I think is quite bad myself because you are taking somebody in your class, why waste all that time trying to find out what she is capable of when you can just read the previous report.'*

Finally, most parents worried about their own life spans and what would happen to their children when they themselves died. Some dealt with this by trying not to think about it such as Sandra's parents. Mr and Mrs Lewis were relieved to find that Malcolm's name would be placed on a register with Social Services to ensure some continuity of care, while Mrs Constandis and Mrs Demetrios both hoped that their other children would contribute to the care of Maria and Costas, perhaps influenced in their attitudes by the way in which they saw the responsibilities of the extended family.

### **The passage of time: 'swings and arrows'**

So far, I have described how the different players in the decision-making process perceived and used time but now I want to turn to the nature of time itself and how the turn of events acted, in Strauss's (1962) terms, as part of a socialising and socialised process. Strauss (*op. cit.*) maintained that the course of events, at both individual and institutional levels, contributes to our transformations of identity and changes in our beliefs about ourselves and who we are, e.g. from child to young adult, from conforming school pupil to rebel, from pupil to worker, from woman to mother and so on. These transformations occur as the result of turning points, which lead individuals to 'take stock, to re-evaluate, revise, re-see and re-judge' (p.71). Of course, changes in status are not fixed and we can fulfil different roles in different contexts and at different points in time, that is, the same woman can be a mother, worker, friend and lover. This point was made by Super in 1981 who, in rejecting a developmental model of career learning, argued that 'transformations' continue to take place both throughout our lives and in the different contexts of our lives.

In trying to understand more about the influence of events on the decision-making process and the choices that are made, I have attempted to construct a model which combines both the planned and expected events, such as those legislative markers described above, with the effects of unplanned or serendipitous events. Strauss identifies six types of turning point, Hodkinson (1996) three. Building on these ideas, as well as those of others such as Miller (1983) and Antikainen, Houtsonen, Kauppila and Huotelin (1996), four complementary and interrelated dimensions of the influence of time on decisions are explored here. First, the influence of turning points which may be the result of *cumulative* experiences or *serendipitous* events, things that happen suddenly or by chance. Generally speaking, these two aspects are linked so that rather than having a 'road to Damascus' experience during which ideas are suddenly transformed, ideas and experiences accumulate over time so that, if and when a critical incident occurs, this merely acts as a trigger to either secondly, *confirming* or *transforming* previously held ideas and opinions. Third, consideration should be given as to the extent to which these experiences or events were *planned*, such as leaving school, or *unplanned* such as falling ill or having a chance meeting and fourth, and related to this dimension, the extent to which these events were *self* or *externally* initiated, i.e. were these events instigated by the young people themselves, e.g. leaving school, or were they imposed on them by others, e.g. going to college.

Nasreen's story is a classic example of this theory. She had had personal experience of counselling and this had triggered an interest in psychology in her, which is what she had originally planned to read at university. However, her nascent interest in the law was reawakened through her participation in some mock trials at college in which she was very successful. In Strauss's terms these mock trials acted as a turning point and she had 'passed the test'. As a result she suddenly saw herself in a new light, possibly becoming a barrister. This caused her to take stock and to consider taking law as an alternative to psychology at university. Then came a further turning point with the sudden news that she would have to have an operation to have her eye removed which led her to have to review her situation again and so, as described in Chapter 4, she decided to stay at college for three years rather than two. Her reaction to this sudden and disturbing event was to be proactive: 'I am trying to see something positive in a negative situation.' By staying on for a further year, she aimed to increase her chances of getting into university through taking an AS level thereby

assisting her entry to law school if she did indeed decide to pursue that option. The operation, which came as a surprise, had upset her plans and could have thrown her off course but for her own determination and sense of personal agency. She had to review and revise her plans and as far as she was able, she used the event to her own advantage.

While Nasreen's story demonstrated her remarkable capacity to withstand unexpected and negative events, Gavin's story provides an example of how the cumulative effects of negative events can also lead to a complete loss of control and exclusion. Gavin's life course was characterised by uncertainty and insecurity as I described in Chapter 5. Gavin's behaviour was always a problem for him as well as the people surrounding him and by the second year of my enquiry his year head, Brian Johnson, told me that Gavin's behaviour had deteriorated to such an extent that each week Gavin almost, but not quite, got to the point where he would be excluded. Located in one of the most challenging neighbourhoods in London the school was very experienced in working with youngsters like Gavin, and after a visit in early 1997 I wrote in my log, 'This is a very experienced school, now with a *great* atmosphere – purposeful, well-ordered. Work everywhere, well equipped, staff and pupils looked beautiful – smiling and comfortable with themselves. Bumped into one of my ex-PGCE students who told me that a new headteacher had transformed the school and its working relationships in just a year.' The staff had a genuine affection for Gavin and it was as if Gavin knew that, as he struggled to stay within the confines of acceptable behaviour.

Home life was also turbulent. By the second year of my enquiry he was visiting his birth parents on a regular basis who were by this time living together although his foster mother, Mrs MacBride, said that they both drank a lot. Gavin had been given a key to their flat. Then he stole several hundred pounds from his foster parents and he was placed with another family where he became involved with a group of Somalian squatters who lived locally. Yet, every day he visited Mrs MacBride although he had become aggressive towards her. I rang Mrs MacBride to catch up on Gavin in May of the same year but only a few days beforehand Gavin had finally been excluded from school.

In this instance, there does not appear to be a single turning point but rather an accumulation of events, some chance, some self-initiated, all negative. Like some of the young people in Alheit's (1994, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) study of unemployed German youth, Gavin became the victim of a chain of events from which he could not escape or would not allow himself to be helped to escape. The theft, the rejection by his foster parents, his school exclusion all combined within what Alheit refers to as a 'negative trajectory' in which the pattern of events in his life led to a spiral of decline.

These two instances could be placed at either end of a continuum of responses to the planned and unplanned events that occurred in these two students' lives. At either end of the continuum I have described two students, both with Statements of Special Educational Needs, both from ethnic minorities and both described by their schools as being 'very bright' and yet each with very different career trajectories. Why should this be the case? According to Bourdieu and using Gibson's (1986) definition, such differences can be explained by the concept of 'habitus', that is the 'culture internalised by the person as dispositions and values which guide behaviour' (p.56). Nasreen's sense of identity, although something that troubled her, was also nevertheless firmly rooted in her culture as a young Moslem woman who was also blind. Her ethnicity, gender and disability were integral to her habitus and it was through this lens that she attempted to make sense of the world whereas Gavin's life experiences were chaotic. His foster home family was stable but, possibly, over-strict and he was in any case rejecting them in favour of his birth parents. He was straddling several worlds all with different sets of values and he was apparently searching to find a context to which he could relate as a young black man and through which he could make sense of the world.

Arguably, such turning points occurred in each of the students' lives and those of their families over the course of the three years, each of whom responded in ways that were driven by a whole range of complex factors. While it was certainly the case that for all of them their cumulative experiences were an essential part of the socialisation process, they each responded differently to their experiences. In Chapter 5, I described how the influence of their special schools on James, David, Andrew and Nasreen helped to socialise them into seeing themselves as members of particular disabled communities or groups. While this socialisation process gave them each a

clear sense of identity, the question must be asked how far did these processes lock them into a specific post-school destination (as suggested by Ward *et al.*, 1991) and to what extent did they attempt to resist any predetermined sets of expectations? Strauss argues that, by regularising processes, institutions support or inhibit individuals' potential for change and development so that 'in a host of ways, you are prepared for what is to come' (p.72). A school may say, 'Here are a range of things you could do when you leave school' or it may say, 'When most pupils from this school leave they go to *x* college or follow *y* route.' The expectations placed on most of the students in this study were that they would follow the route taken by others from the same school and, while recognising that opportunities were often limited, even these limited alternatives were often not made known to students or their parents.

However, sometimes events occurred which caused students or their families to challenge or resist the expectations of the school or the wider system. Each of the following vignettes illustrate the impact of these sudden incidents or happenstance (Miller, 1983) and the continuum along which they are presented represents the scale of response by young people or their parents from proactive and positive coping as in the case of Nasreen above, or in Strauss's (1965) term, 'transformatory,' to reactive and negative responses such as those of Gavin. The examples also illustrate the extent to which the students and their families were allowed to challenge the system and the extent of the resistance they encountered in doing so.

#### *Stuart and the job*

It was clear from my first encounter with Stuart that he was not comfortable at school and school was not comfortable with him – he was constantly in trouble with teachers for fighting and bullying and he found school work difficult. His parents on the other hand had great faith in his capacity to be proactive and to survive in the workplace. His mother said:

*'I know that he won't end up on the dole doing nothing because he's not afraid to go out and ask for work. He'll carry on until he gets it. I am not afraid that he won't get work.'*

In Chapter 5, I described how Stuart had had a job since he was 13 years old so that while his accumulated experience of school was one of failure and rejection, his experiences of work and home were positive, for here he was valued and trusted. Although Stuart had completed a college application form in January of his final year, for some reason this was never actually submitted to the college by the Careers Service. Just before his planned school-leaving date, Stuart decided that he did not want to go to college after all fearful, according to his mother, that he might fail the course and so he had gone down to the Careers Office to enquire about jobs instead. After attending a couple of job interviews, he was offered a post as a driver's mate. Although I only met him for the final time a week after he had started work, his newfound status as a member of the workforce seemed to have transformed him from a clumsy and inarticulate schoolboy into an articulate and self-assured young man. His advice to other school leavers was to plan early and not wait, as he had done, until the end of their final year.

*'Always plan it before you leave school because once you have left school and you can't find yourself a job that is going to be a bit hard for you.'*

Although the school-leaving date was externally imposed, Stuart had understood the importance of taking matters into his own hands and, like Nasreen, he had exercised his personal agency to cope with his negative experiences at school creating for himself a situation where he felt comfortable and which helped to transform him from a boy to a young man.

#### *Sandra and the leaflet*

Cumulative experiences, as well as chance or unexpected events, also confirmed as well as transformed the attitudes of Mr and Mrs Harding. Their experiences of working with professionals over the three years of Sandra's transition from school had changed Mrs Harding's opinion of the school from one of trust to that of disillusionment. This is how she described Sandra's school when we first met:

*'...we are a bit in the dark. We don't know really what colleges there are, where they are, what they actually do. We would like to have help from the school. I am sure we can get it from them. I am sure they are that type of school.'*



However three years later at our final meeting in July she said:

*'The school said that they were looking into some others for us but they were pretty useless...they didn't offer us anything.'*

Sandra's sudden seizure during the second year of the project confirmed her parents' wish to be able to reach her quickly which they felt would be difficult if she was attending a residential college. The opposing views of Sandra's parents and those of her teachers and other professionals and the failure to take any action to support the Hardings have been described in the preceding chapters. In the end, it was a leaflet that dropped through the door of Sandra's best friend that helped the family sort out where Sandra would go when she left school. What is so remarkable and chastening about this particular episode is that, despite the various structures and systems that existed to facilitate planning Sandra's transition from school, only chance solved this family's problem. It was the unplanned, external happenstance that was the turning point and which led them to find the provision, just a few miles from where they lived, which exactly matched what they had had in mind from the outset.

#### *Maria and the accident*

An issue relating to the care of Maria also acted as a turning point for Mrs Constandis as described in Chapter 4:

*'What determined it actually, the final pressure was my daughter being scalded at the home.'*

This event only served to confirm for Mrs Constandis what she had wanted all along, however, which was for her daughter to go to a residential home run by the Rhett's Syndrome Association. I have already described how she did not trust the quality of local provision and the professionals who worked within it and how she saw herself as solely responsible for making all the arrangements for Maria's post-school provision. As Maria's teacher had said, Mrs Constandis seemed to see herself as alone in the world with Maria and was perhaps feeling guilty that she did not care for Maria at home.

In Mrs Constandis' account to me of what happened, the scalding accident became confused with her worries about Maria's diet, which had extended over a much longer period of time.

Mrs Constandis     *She was burnt in January; she lost six kilos, more than a fifth of her weight, last summer. After the summer review we went on holiday, we came back and Maria had gone from 36 kilos – she was 36 kilos when we left mid-July, came back in September, she had gone down to 30 kilos.*

Int.                     *While you were away on holiday?*

Mrs Constandis     *Yes. So that was the first thing. When we came back she could hardly walk, she was so pale, she was blue, the skin under her eyes.*

Int.                     *And you didn't know why?*

Mrs Constandis     *Oh, yeah, no food.*

Int                      *She wouldn't eat?*

Mrs Constandis     *They weren't giving her enough food.*

Int.                     *Oh, I see. So Maria didn't come on holiday with you?*

Mrs Constandis     *No, the holiday is for me to have a break – a total break, I need that break. I have to have that break otherwise...*

When I had tried to clarify the arrangements concerning the holiday, Mrs Constandis became very agitated and emotional. The scalding, Maria's weight loss and her long holiday away from her daughter all led Mrs Constandis to immediately apply for a place at the residential home without involving the school, or indeed Maria herself, although she did need the agreement of local Social Services since they would be funding the placement. Maria was accepted in May and left school a few weeks later, much to the distress of her teachers. The configuration of events combined with Mrs Constandis' own feelings and beliefs meant that she, like the Hardings, acted with little support from the statutory services and outside the transition-planning framework. However, unlike Mrs Constandis who had placed herself outside this framework, Mrs Harding in particular had tried unsuccessfully to operate within it and had become disappointed.

### *Malcolm and the letter*

Malcolm's growing anger and frustration over the course of the three years of this study was a constant theme in my interviews with his parents and was something I observed in the annual review meetings. Malcolm's attempts to transform himself, as Stuart had done, into a young man were constantly thwarted by his father's refusal to allow him any independence. His younger brother's taunts and teasing about his stupidity and the shame of having to take the special school bus also became more than he could bear. After his Year 13 annual review, when Malcolm was almost 18, his father finally agreed to let him try walking to school but, by this time, Malcolm also wanted to leave school. His mother explained:

*'Because he was walking he give up and they (the school) sent me a letter saying they would send the bus back for him but he said, "I don't care. I am not going." And that was it. That was the turning point. He said, "Well, I am not going then."'*

The letter from the school was not the sole reason for Malcolm leaving school but merely confirmed for Malcolm what he wanted to do anyway and provided him with an excuse. In this case, Malcolm had set himself outside the transition-planning framework so that, rather like Mrs Constandis, his own feelings and emotions took over. Unlike Mrs Constandis, however, Malcolm did not possess the same quality of thought, knowledge and language nor the freedom to exercise his will and turn events to his advantage. Instead, he did the only thing within his power and refused to go to school thereby resisting the expectations of both his parents and the school. His personal will was exercised through resistance.

The job with his uncle was part-time and temporary and Mrs Lewis did not know what to do about the future:

*'Mel (Malcolm's teacher) said to me, "You know, you have got to think what is going to happen to him. He can't stay at home all day and all that." Well, I know that, nobody has to tell me that, I know that but at the same time it is very difficult to live with him when you try and tell him to do something he don't want to do. He gives you so much hassle.'*

The school tried to stay in touch by keeping Malcolm on the school register but both his parents were deeply worried about his future and the possible impact on their lives.

### **Commentary**

While there is a clear, legal framework which governs the transition period, this belies the impact that personal agendas and perspectives have in shaping these timescales to fit individual preconceptions. Procedural and societal markers, such as marriage or learning to drive, took on an added significance and poignancy for some parents as they contemplated the future for themselves and their child. Fears of parents and teachers of what the future held sometimes led to young people being denied the experiences necessary for them in shaping their 'horizons for action'. Differences in perceptions of time also led to difficulties in communication, adding to the feelings of frustration described by some families. Parents tended to want to begin discussions about post-school destinations sooner rather than later. They were more concerned with longer-term, lifestyle issues while professionals, particularly teachers, were more concerned with immediate placements. Most young people, like their non-disabled peers, had dreams and aspirations that spanned both the immediate and longer-term future. Accepting Strauss's proposition that institutions attempt to regularise transformations, i.e. that changes in status are managed according to a set of unwritten rules, then it could be argued that professionals' assumptions about post-school destinations acted in a similar manner. What a number of these vignettes illustrate is how happenstance or chance seemed to provide a means by which parents or young people exercised their will in those situations where they felt relatively powerless. It was as if they needed an excuse through which to challenge the status quo and that what such events served to do was to clarify what they really wanted to happen, causing them to take action.

## Chapter 9

### Whose Decision? Conclusions, Propositions, Limitations and Implications

#### Introduction

This report of a three-year study has explored the lives of 12 students with special educational needs as they prepared to leave school and move to their next destinations. My purpose in undertaking the study was to understand more about their experiences and those of their families during this period of time. I wanted to know more about how decisions came to be made, who and what influenced those decisions and what influence, if any, young people and their parents or carers exerted. Generally the process was far from the rational and logical experience implied by the term 'decision-making' but instead, as the stories unfolded, they took on a kind of momentum of their own. What would happen next? Whose viewpoint would dominate? Why did nobody seem to listen to what *x* or *y* was saying? Seen from the perspectives of the students and their families, the stories were full of tensions and unexpected events, with the occasional clues as to what they wanted to happen. As I returned each year to visit them I was never sure what I would find. Sometimes teachers became so involved with my study that they would telephone me with news of the latest turn of events: Kylie had lost her work placement; Gavin had been excluded from school. Now I want to draw out some of the common themes and issues which emerged from these stories by reconfiguring the relationship between them and offering some conclusions. First, however, I return to my original research questions to reflect on my findings.

#### Conclusions

What are the influences on the decisions that are made about the post-school destinations of young people with special educational needs?

A common thread running throughout this study has been an exploration of the influences *on* the main participants on the decision-making process as well as an

examination *of* their influence on the process itself and upon each other. I have proposed that during the school-leaving period and in common with other young people, those with special educational needs are concerned with the process of establishing their identities and of becoming adults while their parents or carers are engaged in coping with the stresses and strains that often accompany this process. Professionals on the other hand attempted to accommodate the demands of their roles, national policies, and the students and their families. Each of these individual experiences had a bearing on the decision-making process as each player to a greater or lesser extent brought their needs and perspectives into play. There was a complex interplay of influences, both positive and negative throughout the process, some pulling in one direction, some in another. At the start of this enquiry I suggested that aside from their disability or learning difficulty the influences on young people with special educational needs in making decisions about their future lives were the same as the influences on all young people. To a large extent this has turned out to be the case, so that the differences lay not so much in the nature of the influences but in how far these influences were acknowledged by others as an integral part of the young person's experience of growing up and deciding what they wanted to do when they left school. This lead to the question:

- How does a young person's disability and/or learning difficulty interact with other influences in the decision-making process?

The young person's disability or learning difficulty was important in shaping other people's attitudes towards them which in turn led to assumptions being made about what was best for the young person without regard to other considerations. These considerations included the individual attributes of the young person, e.g. their personal interests, preferences and competences; the significance of friendships in making post-school choices; the need to assert their adolescence; the importance of gender and cultural differences; the need to explore individual 'horizons for action'.

That is not to say that the impact of the young person's disability or learning difficulty should be ignored but it is in the interaction with these other influences that the nature of the student's special educational need begins to have a differential effect. I have

also noted the importance of the extent of the influence *of* young people on the decisions that are to be made, that is their personal agency. Those with sensory and physical disabilities had a strong sense of themselves as disabled and their disability was one of a number of factors that influenced and shaped their ideas and opinions. Several of them expressed very clearly their belief in themselves as part of a separate, identifiable group. To disregard the impact of a young person's disability would be to ignore an integral part of who they are and how they have shaped their identities or have been shaped by it. Alternatively, to regard their disability as a tragedy and the overriding factor in considering their future lives is to ignore the other equally important aspects of themselves and who they want to become.

While it would not be entirely accurate to make a clear distinction between those pupils with learning difficulties and those without, there was some relationship between learning difficulties and the extent to which they were allowed, and I use the word advisedly, to contribute to the decision-making process. Like the young people in Riddell *et al.*'s (1999) study, the students in this study were all able to express something about themselves and their preferences but, as I also noted earlier, the extent to which they were each enabled to assert their preferences or allowed to influence the process generally lay in the gift of others. Those pupils with learning difficulties were least likely to have their views considered.

Despite this, some young people did succeed in asserting their views and opinions.

- Are there particular individual characteristics and strategies which provide some young people with advantage in the decision-making process even if they have a disability and/or learning difficulty?

This is difficult to answer. It certainly appeared that the nature of the student's learning difficulty or disability was to some extent a factor but so was their personal resilience, their sense of identity and the security of their family network. There were no single factors which consistently made a difference. More, it was the interaction between various internal and external factors that seemed to influence the pattern of events. Gavin and Stuart are cases in point. Both male, they both attended mainstream

schools, both had statements for emotional and behavioural difficulties, both had ideas about their future lives. There any similarities ended. Stuart came from a secure and caring white working-class family whose father and mother both worked and who had been encouraged to work at weekends since he was 13 years old; Gavin was Afro-Caribbean living in care and spending a lot of time on London streets with sporadic contact with his birth parents, both reportedly involved with drugs or alcohol. Stuart secured for himself a full-time, permanent job as a warehouseman in a local firm; Gavin ended up living in a squat with a group of asylum seekers, and being excluded from two schools in quick succession. So, the factors that advantaged some young people in the decision-making process seem to be similar to those identified by Banks *et al.* (1992) whose study concluded that feelings of self-worth and self-control and the interaction of these feelings with school attainment, race, gender and class (and in this study, the nature of the young person's special educational needs) were all influential in determining the nature of the decision-making process and the subsequent outcome.

- What are the influences on the relationships in the decision-making process and what impact does disability and/or learning difficulty have in the formation of these relationships?

The extent to which parents saw themselves as lifelong carers of their children had a powerful influence on their relationship with their child, which in turn influenced the extent to which they granted their child autonomy in the decision-making process. I have also speculated that their child's gender as well as family cultural traditions may also have influenced their relationship with their child. However, there is an assumption that the parents of young people with special educational needs play a much more significant part in the decision-making process than the parents of other youngsters. Again it appears to be a question of degree. Brannen (1996), Hodkinson *et al.* (1996) and Ball *et al.* (2000) have all argued that the degree of involvement by families and their influence on young people in the decision-making processes has been underestimated by researchers and that only in the small minority of cases is the family's role insignificant. On the other hand, in this study, particularly in relation to students with learning difficulties, parental opinions superseded any views the child



might have. So, the opinions of parents of children with learning difficulties were more influential, in some cases excluding or overriding those of their children.

Parents' relationships with professionals were influenced by their past experiences of professionals and their attitudes towards them, their access to information and their knowledge of and confidence in the systems and procedures that were meant to support them. But personal responses to the stress engendered by the school-leaving process were also important in parents' relationship with professionals. The extent to which parents adopted predominantly problem or emotion-focused strategies coloured their relationships with professionals and how they were regarded. At times this led to frustration and anger on both sides resulting in mistrust – schools sometimes felt parents were over-protective, parents felt professionals had their own agendas.

While parental relationships with their children were often coloured by their perceived role as lifelong carers, teachers' relationships with the pupils were influenced by what they regarded as being 'best for the child'. This sometimes led to assumptions being made about destinations, i.e. children from this school always go on to *x* or *y*, as well as real dilemmas about what course of action to take, particularly where options were very limited.

- Why are some people 'heard' in the decision-making process and some people not?

The degree to which individuals exercised differential levels of influence in the decision-making process sprang partly from the status they were accorded by others involved in the decision-making process. Parents' views were likely to be accorded more status than those of their offspring. Some types of decisions were accorded greater status and were more likely to be followed up than others although this was linked to who was proposing the idea. Students' proposals were less likely to be followed up than those of professionals or their parents.

Issues relating to communication operated at several different levels. First, there was the degree to which pupils relied on alternative means of communication to express their views and the extent to which others were sensitive to these and allowed time for

students' views to be expressed and interpreted. Second, there was the nature of the language that was used by the different services and the degree to which non-professionals were able to understand and relate to it. Third, there were difficulties in gaining access to information particularly for parents.

Access to information and know-how was also a powerful determinant in the relative power people had to influence decisions. Parents often relied on their own experience as well as family, neighbours and local informal networks for support and information. Some people withheld information as a way of retaining power and control. However, access to information was not always enough. Feelings of deference towards teachers and other professionals, especially as experienced by families from ethnic minorities, sometimes meant that they were not able to use the information that they had.

It is also worth speculating that the very public nature of the decision-making process has a powerful influence on the degree of influence exercised by individuals. As I have pointed out elsewhere, most decisions about what to do are made in private – individuals may discuss them in the privacy of their own homes or the careers office or classroom and a plan may be drawn up (or not). But for young people with special educational needs the decision-making process has become an official and bureaucratic process. The need to meet the demands and expectations of the procedures has a strong influence on some professionals which led to these becoming more important than listening to the voices of the young people and their parents.

- How does the passage of time enable or constrain the decision-making process?

The passage of time is an inevitable part of transition and those involved in this study construed and used time in multiple ways, depending on their perspective and personal experiences. While the law prescribed when certain events were to take place, even these were subject to local interpretation depending on individual professional responses. Furthermore it is important to remember that some young people in this study had little understanding of past or future and for some their involvement in this project contributed to their increased awareness that they would

eventually leave school. So the extent to which the passage of time enabled or constrained events depended partly on the individual's role, perspective and level of understanding.

Time provided some parents with the hope they needed that their child would grow out of their learning difficulties, that they would be 'cured' and thus able to pursue a 'normal' adult life and career. But there was also a strong sense among some parents that time was running out and as they looked towards the future, if they dared, they worried about who would take care of their child. Where the child had a degenerative condition, time was in a very real sense running out.

There was also a sense in which some parents tried to stretch the time that their offspring would remain in the education system, a response reflected in the behaviour of some teachers as they assumed or persuaded young people to remain at school until they were 17 or 18 before leaving to go to college. Of course, this extension of the transition period is not exclusive to young people with special educational needs, a fact noted throughout this study, but like some of the young people in Banks *et al.*'s study in 1992 what many young people lacked was any sense of choice and decisions were taken despite, rather than because of, personal preferences.

The passage of time and the natural course of events also acted as an opportunity as well as a constraint. The scale of their responses to external events can be represented along a continuum from proactive and positive to reactive and negative. Chance or serendipitous events sometimes provided young people and parents with the opportunity to influence or to take control of the decision-making process, particularly where they had had opinions that had not been acknowledged. In other words, happenstance provided them with the opportunity to exercise the personal agency not acknowledged by others in the decision-making process. At the other end of the scale young people and their families became the victims of a spiral of events from which they could not escape.

### **Reconfiguring the findings**

Having summarised my main findings, I want now to analyse them from the perspective of ecosystemic theory. The advantage of ecosystemic theory in

understanding decision-making is that it spans both psychological and cultural or social considerations. Norwich (2000) locates Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic theory in the broad school of organismic psychology (as opposed to mechanistic or individualistic approaches) in which the individual cannot be separated from their context, so that the whole is greater than and different from the sum of the individual parts. This notion has in the past, as discussed in Chapter 2, had an important influence both on the understanding of career learning, i.e. how people develop ideas about who they want to be or become, and on work with families particularly where a family member has a special educational need and which has led to the development of family systems theory.

While Bronfenbrenner's work is firmly located within the organismic school of thought, Jones (1995) argues that his ideas do not constitute a theory as such because they do not provide explanations or predictions about what will happen in certain circumstances. Rather his approach provides a framework for organising existing knowledge – looking at things in a new way and raising new questions about human behaviour.

The usefulness of Bronfenbrenner's framework for looking at what happens during the decision-making process lies partly in his focus on the roles that individuals adopt and the relationships between individuals, systems, organisations. In this study I have referred to the decision-making unit as consisting of the child, their family, and teachers and other professionals. However, using ecosystemic theory, this unit could be said to constitute a meso-system since in Bronfenbrenner's terms the so-called unit spanned two micro-systems, i.e. the family and the school.

The relationships between the parents and their child within the family micro-system were dominated by the parents' perception of their role as carer and their anxieties about the future and wanting the best for their child. This in turn limited the rights that some parents felt able to ascribe to their children, e.g. to go out with friends, to travel independently, to go to the youth club, to prepare for change. Most parents struggled with the need to give their child more autonomy while retaining their belief in their child's dependence and it was this struggle that dominated the nature of many of the relationships.

The relationship between parents and teachers was governed by their different perceptions of the transition process, that is as the world existed for each of them within their different roles and their place within the ecosystem. Their perspectives were shaped by their individual past experiences, their roles and responsibilities, how they construed the young person and their individual micro-system or environment. While parents saw their role as carers, teachers and other professionals were partly responsible for giving advice and information. This role as information-giver gave professionals a good deal of power within the relationship with parents and young people, and the extent to which they shared information or recognised parents' need for information was an important influence in the relationship during the decision-making process. Their contrasting perspectives are summed up in Table 9:1 below.

**Table 9:1 Different perspectives of parents and teachers**

Parents' perceptions	Teachers' perceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sees child as continuing to be dependent</li> <li>• concerned with individual child</li> <li>• concerned about the longer-term future</li> <li>• mixed feelings about planning for the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sees child as needing to become more autonomous</li> <li>• concerned with group</li> <li>• concerned about post-school destinations</li> <li>• procedures determine when planning begins</li> </ul>

These differences in perspective led to feelings of stress and anxiety among most parents who coped with their feelings in different ways but all of whom adopted certain coping strategies either predominantly problem-focused or predominantly emotion-focused or a combination of the two (Lazarus, 1993). These strategies were rarely recognised or supported by the professionals with whom they came into contact and parents were sometimes seen as over-protective of their child, as over-anxious or interfering. Rarely did professionals attempt to recast or reframe parents' attitudes or

behaviour in order to cast their behaviour in a more positive light (Molnar & Lindquist, 1989).

The teacher-pupil relationship is circumscribed by the teacher's perception of the young person and their needs, which may differ between individual staff members as well as between other professionals with whom they come into contact. Their perception of the child is, according to Weatherley (1979), also influenced by their perception of the family, i.e. good or bad parents, supportive or troublesome etc. But the teachers' and other professionals' perception of transition is also influenced by factors in the broader macro-system such as the need to interpret and follow national policies and guidance on transition planning, as well as their knowledge of locally available education, training and work opportunities, as well as health and Social Services support for young people identified as having special educational needs. Their interpretation of these wider national policies which had only recently been introduced at the time of the study, as well as local opportunities, are mediated through their own needs and personal agendas. This in turn influenced their responses within the decision-making processes that went from continuing to rely on custom and practice, to domesticating or ritualising the changes through to beginning to question existing practices and beliefs.

The young person straddles both these two micro-systems – they inhabit both worlds. That led to confusion for some such as Malcolm and Costas; determination in others such as Nasreen; resignation or rebellion in Kylie and Gavin. Their need to assert their identity as young people was clearly demonstrated by most of the young people in this study in a variety of ways, but the extent to which they were able to do so varied between individuals and between settings. The young people were engaging in what Bronfenbrenner refers to as an 'ecological transition' as they prepared to leave school and move onto the next phase of their lives, which for many young people also implies a degree of independence from their families.

Ecological transitions also imply a series of turning points during which society's perceptions of the individual and individuals' perceptions of themselves and their role may change (Strauss, 1962). Strauss maintained that the course of events contributes to our transformations of identity and changes our beliefs about ourselves, e.g. from

child to young adult, from conforming school pupil to rebel, from pupil to worker and so on. These transformations occur as the result of turning points which lead individuals to 'take stock, to re-evaluate, revise, re-see and re-judge' (p.71). Yet, as Strauss points out, transition also entails a process of internal transformation in which individuals begin to see themselves in new ways and grasp opportunities to make personal decisions and engage with the more challenging adult world. Young people with special educational needs are often held back as a result of how others perceive them and their needs despite their struggles to engage with their internal transformation into a young adult. However, for people with profound and complex learning difficulties any changes that occur in their lives tend to happen despite rather than because of their personal endeavours. Whatever transitions occur are as the result of external circumstances.

Looking in more detail at the process of transformation that occurs during transitions and the importance of turning points, I argued in Chapter 8 for a model, which incorporated several complementary and interrelated dimensions. Turning points resulted from *cumulative* experiences and/or *serendipitous* events, which were often related so that if and when a sudden or unexpected event occurred this *confirmed* or *transformed* previously held convictions or viewpoints. Turning points may result from *planned* or *unplanned* events which in turn can be *self* or *externally* initiated.

Where participants in the decision-making process felt powerless and their viewpoints were disregarded, for whatever reason, these serendipitous and unplanned events sometimes acted as the excuse individuals needed to assert their wishes. These chance events or happenstance confirmed what they had wanted to happen but had not been heard because of lack of status and influence within the decision-making process.

Why were they not listened to? One reason for not being heard relates to the challenge to existing roles which occurs during periods of transition. Bronfenbrenner refers to this as the 'embedding of roles'. Roles define the activities in which one engages within systems. These are constructed through the expectation of that role placed on it by society as well as the personal interpretation of roles. The same person can adopt numerous different roles and these may differ between contexts, as well as over time and in response to changes in the environment. As young people with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities seek to move beyond their role as child to young adult, the parental role as carer is challenged. Arguably, some professionals interpreted their role as 'knowing best' in terms of post-school destinations and they resisted any challenge by parents to discuss alternative ideas. Roles become fixed and any challenges to roles are not heard.

In drawing together this section I have therefore formulated the following propositions.

1. That decision-making is an ongoing process which is messy and complex rather than logical and rational.
2. That individuals exercise a disproportionate degree of influence and power within the process and that those who are least likely to be listened to are young people with learning difficulties.
3. That, in the face of not being heard, young people and parents sometimes use serendipitous events as a means of asserting their opinions.
4. That influences on young people's preferences are similar to those on all young people but that these influences are not necessarily acknowledged.
5. That assumptions made by professionals about transition procedures and post-school destinations exercise a strong influence particularly on post-16 destinations.
6. That informal or community networks act as an important source of advice and support but that these are not sufficiently respected or valued by support services.
7. That national policies and guidance can influence practice, albeit slowly.

### **Proposition 1**

*Decision-making is an ongoing process which is messy and complex rather than logical and rational*

There is a mismatch between the nature of the decision-making procedures laid down in the *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice* and the reality of decision-making processes. Despite the existence of a formal structure, individuals constructed their own time frames or, using Bronfenbrenner's term, their own 'time perspective', during which the process of decision-making occurred so that there was no clearly defined beginning or end to the process. Some parents started thinking about what would happen when their child left school when their child was only 12 or 13 – for



them the process had begun. They were beginning to explore ideas and think about possibilities, weigh up the pros and cons or worry about the longer-term future. Young people, however, were largely dependent on others to trigger their ideas about what they might do when they left school. For teachers the process was governed by the formal procedures, which had a single objective: to decide where the pupil would go when they left school. For other professionals, while their concerns may have extended beyond the school gate, they were certainly not as long-term as those of the parents.

Different agendas and concerns make communication difficult at times and require professionals to demonstrate particular sensitivity towards what may be conflicting sets of needs between pupils and parents. The process from the students' perspective is one in which they are searching for an identity as an adult, making choices that match who they think they want to become, although this process may be circumscribed by their experiences and their capacity to interpret and learn from those experiences. From the parents' point of view, the process is generally an emotional one in which they develop ways of coping with what is a stressful period of change and uncertainty, often dominated by their fears and anxieties about the future. As well as a need to satisfy their procedural obligations, for teachers the process may be dominated by a concern to ensure that a placement after school is found, so that the students' time in education is prolonged.

On the whole decisions are not taken within the formal structures of the annual review meetings although this setting may provide an opportunity to formally record decisions made elsewhere or agree to take action to implement decisions. Instead, the process takes place over time and outside the formal setting of meetings and may culminate in a decision being reached but, equally, may not. Events may just happen without any agreement being reached or conscious choices being made such as when Kylie dropped out of school. Sometimes events acted as turning points, confirming or transforming ideas, which were simmering but not fully explored or expressed. The letter from Michael's school telling him that the school bus would call for him which caused him to stop going to school or the college's failure to get in touch with Stuart which led him to go out and get a job, are two such examples. Many decisions are interconnected, with the outcomes of one decision being dependent on another,

sometimes resulting in feelings of ‘going round in circles’ as Costas described in his annual review meeting.

### **Proposition 2**

*Some individuals exercise a disproportionate degree of influence and power within the decision-making process and those who are least likely to have their views listened to are young people with learning difficulties*

Of all those involved in the decision-making process, pupils with learning difficulties were least likely to exercise any direct influence on the decisions that were made or have their views heard. Yet most of them were able to express some ideas about what they wanted and many of these ideas were linked to their emergent role as young adults, e.g. go to the pub, have a girlfriend, get a job, join a youth club. These aspirations appeared to carry less weight than decisions about post-school placements. Sometimes neither parents nor teachers were aware of the young person’s aspirations or, even if they were, they did not value or respect them. They were reluctant to accept the pupil’s adolescence (a point made by Mr Doyle) and the consequent shift in the balance of power that this change of role necessitated. While parents were often driven by their own fears and concerns, professionals were influenced by their assumptions about what was best for the pupil or by custom and practice. This problem of not being heard is not, of course, confined to decisions about post-school destinations. In their study of children with profound and complex learning difficulties, Evans and Ware (1987) stated bluntly that most staff failed to respond to the children’s attempts to communicate, while Riddell *et al.* (1999) concluded that in adult services for people with learning difficulties, despite the rhetoric of advocacy, power continued to reside in the hands of professionals. So, the underlying reasons for this apparent failure to listen to young people with learning difficulties resides in a combination of factors: the failure of others to recognise and value pupils’ attempts to communicate as well as the substance of their communication; a fear of the future; a wish to maintain the status quo and the ‘embeddedness’ (Bronfenbrenner, *op. cit.*) of their respective roles: child, parent, teacher.

If students with learning difficulties were likely to exercise the least influence over the process, parents, particularly those who were both from ethnic minorities and a low socio-economic bracket, also stood to experience problems in having their

opinions acknowledged and respected. Their difficulties arose from a combination of lack of information both about the process itself and about the options that were available, their lack of trust of professionals sometimes combined with feelings of deference, the language used by professionals, and the failure of some professionals to recognise and build on parents' attempts to become proactively involved in the decision-making processes. Despite experiencing similar problems, some parents, especially middle income families whose mother tongue was English and/or who had knowledge of the system, were more likely to express their opinions and exercise influence over what happened because they had what Bourdieu refers to as 'cultural as well as economic capital' (Gibson, 1986). Mr and Mrs Simpson were one of the few families who had sufficient confidence to make their opinions known and whose opinions caused James's school to review at least some of its practices.

While professionals apparently exercised most influence over what happened, they in turn were influenced by the macro-system in which they operated. It was their responsibility to interpret the procedures laid down by law, advise parents and young people about what options were available, and provide support. Options were determined by what was available locally. Professionals' perceptions about what was best for the young person were tempered by their knowledge of what was available; their attitudes towards the young person and their families; their views about their own responsibilities in the transition process.

Access to information was an important determinant of power and influence in the decision-making process. The more information an individual possessed the more influence they had. Information was gained as a result of an individual's role and status within the process. Difficulties for parents in gaining access to information were exacerbated by not knowing what questions to ask – they did not know what they did not know.

Another way of exercising power was through withholding information. Sometimes this was done deliberately, as when Mrs Constandis withheld information about the Rhett's Society care home from the school. On other occasions information was withheld because assumptions were made by professionals about what parents and

young people needed to know, such as alternatives to residential college provision, or already knew, such as parents' knowledge about the schools' 16+ provision.

The settings in which formal decisions were made also placed young people and their families at a disadvantage in the decision-making process, a finding supported by the research of both Weatherley (1979) and latterly Tisdall (1996). Difficulties in asserting their ideas sprang from the formality of the proceedings: the structure and pace of meetings, the status and number of people present and the language that was used. Professionals generally regarded formal review meetings and other procedures as bureaucratic exercises and meetings were conducted in ways that were not generally sensitive to the individual needs and styles of parents and their offspring. Bronfenbrenner (*op. cit.*) also noted the impact of different settings on human behaviour and distinguishes between the responses of middle-class and working-class mothers to formal settings and the effect that this in turn had on their children.

### **Proposition 3**

*In the face of not being heard, young people and parents sometimes use serendipitous events as a means of asserting their wishes*

Decision-making is a messy and unpredictable business and part of this messiness arises from the natural course of events that govern our lives and the responses we have to those events. In the face of not being heard, parents and young people sometimes capitalised on these sudden or unexpected events to assert their own ideas and opinions, despite the views held by others. Serendipitous events acted not only as a means of confirming or transforming ideas, these events sometimes provided the means by which an individual could follow through what they had wanted to do but, for one reason or another, had had their opinions disregarded. Malcolm's decision to stop going to school, Mr and Mrs Harding's decision to let Sandra go to their local college and Stuart's decision not to go to college but get a job were all made as a result of unexpected events and each of them had encountered problems in making their views known to others.

### **Proposition 4**

*Influences on young people's preferences are similar to those on all young people but these influences are not necessarily recognised or valued*

As described in Chapter 5, the influences on the preferences of young people with special educational needs are similar to those experienced by all young people. As Kidd and Watts (1996) sum up, these are derived from social expectations which relate to an individual's social background; immediate influences such as friends, family, the media, teachers and so on; and individual attributes including levels of competence and academic achievements, self-efficacy and personal interests and values. In addition, for some of the young people in this study, having a disability was an important positive influence – being disabled was an integral part of their identity. Their disability interacted with other diverse influences which shaped who they were and who they wanted to become.

That is not to say that Andrew, Nasreen and James, unlike David, wanted to remain solely within their particular disability communities but each struggled with the problems they encountered in mixing with their non-disabled peers. This sense of themselves as a disabled person as well as someone who wanted to succeed in the non-disabled world meant that they looked for post-school provision that would provide them with a bridge into this world.

Those with moderate difficulties in learning saw their disability in negative rather than positive terms. They were more likely to mention problems with learning than those with more severe learning difficulties as a factor in circumscribing their preferences. Kylie, Stuart and Malcolm each mentioned their learning or behavioural difficulties as something that could prevent them from achieving their ambitions.

It is the task of the support services to recognise and build on these influences yet, more often, factors other than the young person's disability were not genuinely taken into account in planning programmes. Interests, personal preferences and aspirations were rarely discussed and tended to be overridden by logistical or practical considerations.

### **Proposition 5**

*Assumptions made by professionals about transition procedures and post-school destinations exercise a strong influence particularly on post-16 destinations*

If the special school had a sixth form or FE unit, teachers assumed that pupils would remain at school when they reached 16, while teachers in schools without such units assumed the students would go to a residential specialist college. It was assumed that the pupils from the two comprehensive schools would leave school and go to college. Furthermore, there was also an assumption that parents and students knew this to be the case.

There was very limited recognition that the pupils and/or their parents might have a different opinion or indeed that there was a decision to be made about whether the student remained at school or went to college or left education altogether. I have suggested that there are a number of underlying reasons for such assumptions.

First, professionals were genuinely concerned to extend the young person's time in education because of the lack of opportunities, particularly for young people with moderate learning difficulties, once they left school or college. With the dramatic fall in the numbers of young people with moderate learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties entering employment over the last 25 years (Atkinson, 1984; May & Hughes, 1985; Freshwater & Leyden, 1989; Armstrong & Davies, 1995; and Hornby & Kidd, 2001) there is some justification for this point of view.

Alternatively, and following Weatherley and Lipsky's (1977) proposals, basing judgements on such assumptions might also be a means of managing workloads. Teachers in particular avoid becoming too involved with the complexities of the decision-making process by imposing decisions based on custom and practice, a classic means of dealing with complex decisions according to Mellers *et al.* (1998).

Finally, they may also become part of the socialisation process that creates a set of expectations for pupils from their particular school (Strauss, 1962). In acknowledging the power of institutionally imposed progression routes, Strauss notes, 'If there are the usual institutional acknowledgements of partial steps towards the goal, then these may constitute turning points in self-conception also. If the institutionalised steps are purely formalized, are no longer invested with meaning by the institution, or if the candidate believes them to be of no real significance, they will not, of course, be turning points for him (sic)' (p.68). In other words, the extent to which schools make

their sixth forms or FE units significantly different and the extent to which they prepare young people for those transitions will have an effect on how young people regard themselves and their emergent role as young adults. Indeed, it could be argued that it is not possible to create a sufficiently different environment, which would support a student's transformation of identity, within a setting where the majority of pupils have been since they were very young children.

### **Proposition 6**

*Informal or community networks act as an important source of advice and support but these are not sufficiently respected or valued by support services*

Like the mothers in Wilkinson's (2000) study, parents relied heavily on informal networks of support for information, or using Bronfenbrenner's term, the family 'meso-system'. Siblings, grandparents, cousins, neighbours, friends, workmates, other parents were all mentioned as sources of advice and support although some families had stronger networks than others. These networks went largely unrecognised by professionals. Family systems theorists such as Pell and Cohen (1995) argue that families should be seen as 'environments within environments' (p.388), taking into account the forces at work within the family. Service providers need to increase the capacity of families to use and build on these naturally occurring networks rather than regarding them as a threat.

Parents' personal experiences at work or of education also influenced their ideas about what was best for their child. Even though the young people were not present these experiences exercised an influence on them through their parents as a result of what Bronfenbrenner called 'exo-systems'.

In setting up integration programmes the significance of building friendship networks also went largely unrecognised by the students' schools which in turn influenced students' attitudes as to where they wanted to go when they left school. Friendships or lack of them were a significant factor in influencing the choices of James, Nasreen and Andrew and possibly Costas and David. Each of these students had experienced some form of integration programme, whereby they joined mainstream school classes for some lessons each week. James and Nasreen were both very clear that they actively disliked these sessions because of the attitudes of other students towards them

and because they had no friends, which in turn helped to convince them that they wanted to go to a specialist college. The importance of being able to communicate and make friends was also an important consideration for Andrew and David in making their choices. And while Costas did not say as much, he was reported as disliking his solitary art sessions at the local comprehensive which may have reinforced his desire to stay on at school, despite his parents' wishes.

### **Proposition 7**

*National policies and guidance can influence practice, albeit slowly*

At the macro-systemic level of the decision-making process the Code of Practice offers guidance on the processes and procedures to be followed during the school-leaving process, as does the 1992 FHE Act on the selection of colleges. While the latter's procedures were reduced to a largely ritualistic set of activities, the Code's guidance did appear to have had some effect on practice, albeit slowly. Both authorities had provided their own advice and guidance to their schools on the conduct of 14+ annual reviews and had provided transition planning proformas for completion. As well as pressure from LEAs, pressure for changes to practice came from three sources. First, professionals, particularly teachers, used the Code to either confirm or transform what they were already doing, so that the Code acted as a turning point in the development of their practice. Second, challenges from parents or the young people themselves acted as a trigger to professionals to question their approach, particularly in relation to the amount and quality of information they gave to parents and the assumptions that they made about destinations. Third, I suspect that through the very nature of the questions I asked as part of this enquiry, some teachers were given pause for thought. There was therefore a small knock-on effect from national policy level down through the layers to the pupils themselves but the effect was still minimal at the time of this study. The question remains as to whether such policies alone, however well intentioned, have the power to challenge the kind of structural imbalances in the power relationships and respond to the complexities that are manifest in the decision-making processes that I have described.

### **Limitations**

The conclusions that I have drawn must necessarily be seen in the light of the constraints of this enquiry. Case studies are by their very nature singular – they



provide insights into one particular case at one particular point in time. It is important therefore to regard these findings with some care and to avoid over-claiming or making generalisable statements which cannot be substantiated. Thus, I have used the term 'proposition' rather than 'conclusion', which suggests a more tentative formulation. Nevertheless, Gomm *et al.* (2000) maintain that case study researchers can increase generalisability by first, thinking about their sample based on what is already known about the target group (in this case I included a spread of special educational needs, schooling, socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds and gender) and second, by the systematic selection of cases until a typical sample has been identified. This second consideration was not one that was open to me as I was reliant on the goodwill and time of teachers to help me to select my case studies. This led to a further limitation as the teachers tended to choose families whom they thought would be likely to co-operate in the research and who would be likely to let me visit their homes. Sometimes, they also selected pupils whom they thought might benefit from the attention derived from being involved in a project while another argued that a particular pupil must be involved because pupils with profound and complex learning difficulties were often overlooked in studies of this type. Thus, from the outset of the project, personal preferences and agendas played a significant role in the final selection of the cases to be chosen.

However, Gomm *et al.*'s third proposal concerns generalisability within cases. Being able to validate my findings over the course of three years, involving several different viewpoints within each case, and by employing triangular reflexivity in which participants were asked to comment on their ideal, what they predicted would happen and what actually happened does enable me to feel more confident about my findings than I otherwise might. Stake (1995) has also argued that generalisation occurs when the reader makes links to their own experiences but I leave that to the reader to judge for themselves.

A second area of limitation concerns access. I relied on the schools to let me know when annual review meetings were to be held. Sometimes the teachers forgot to invite me, or sometimes the meetings were cancelled or rescheduled. Sometimes I was constrained by the demands of my job which meant I was unable to attend. Perhaps a more significant difficulty I encountered was my own inability to communicate with

three of the students. Of course, there are always constraints imposed by communication not least the researcher's capacity and skill in being able to understand the perspective of the researched. In this case, however, Maria, David and Andrew used alternative forms of communication and, while I was able to get Andrew and David to write down some of their replies to my questions, I was largely reliant on a third party to interpret my questions and the students' responses. This had several disadvantages. First, there were certainly occasions when I felt as if the teacher, who was acting as the interpreter on one occasion, imposed her own views and opinions reinterpreting my questions or imposing her own interpretation on Andrew's and David's replies. Second, I was unable to follow up ideas or comments in the same way as is possible without an intermediary. I found myself assuming an understanding rather than becoming involved in a protracted dialogue. Third, Maria's cognitive level was such that she had little concept of past, present and future so that I had to rely heavily on observation and inference to understand what her perspective might be.

The third area of limitation involves my own role, how I was regarded by the participants and my unwitting influence on the chain of events. I have already said that teachers selected some students because they felt that the students would benefit from being involved in the project. It became increasingly difficult and indeed pointless to maintain an entirely neutral position. Finch (1993) describes how in her interviews with the wives of parish priests she was seen as a confidante and there is no doubt that a number of the parents regarded me in a similar light. Sometimes they wanted information, advice or reassurance. An extract from my log records my feelings after a particularly long interview with Sandra's mother, Mrs Harding:

*'Mrs Harding did not consciously use me as a counsellor but that was the process. She wanted reassurance about her viewpoint (which differs from her husband's) – she wanted to share her anxieties about her feelings of guilt at believing that Sandra would be better off staying away from home for some nights each week.'*

On one occasion I passed on some information which, despite assuring all students that what they told me was confidential, I felt I had to relay to a teacher. There was an outside chance the information might have made a difference. Some parents were genuinely sorry when we met for the last time and we hugged our goodbyes. Yet I

was also concerned that some parents were disappointed when they saw that their involvement in the project had not made a real difference to what happened to their child, and that when it did not, they regarded me as just another useless professional.

My findings are also limited by what Menard (1991) refers to as 'panel attrition'. In other words those students who I lost touch with such as Gavin. This means that those who are often the most vulnerable and whose lives are the most complex do not have their experiences fully represented in the research.

Finally, what would I have done differently if I were to start again? Perhaps the most significant change I would make would be in relation to the way I dealt with the data. Due to time constraints and other pressures, I tended to collect and then store the data from each phase rather than analysing it as I went along. When I finally reached the stage of detailed analysis at the end of the three years, I found myself wanting to follow up particular themes or lines of enquiry which I had missed simply because I had not engaged with the data in any depth before. Yet the moment had passed. Thus the reflexive process of refining and reformulating ideas in any systematic way was weakened because the analysis of data was concentrated over a six-month rather than a three-year period. So there are themes or ideas that I could have tested out or followed up on but which I did not.

### **Implications for policy and practice**

I began this study with an examination of the legislative and policy context of my enquiry and it is to this that I return in drawing together the practical implications of this research. In doing so, I want to consider the curricular, policy and practical implications particularly in the light of the proposed Connexions Service and the revised Code of Practice.

#### *Curriculum*

While some teachers may complain that some young people with special educational needs are unrealistic in their aspirations, it is important to recognise that this is an essential part of career learning. Through the curriculum individuals need to be supported in fantasising about who they want to become, to dream their dreams, because this is part of the natural process of growing up. Like James, part of this

process of exploring possibilities may include having to come to terms with the impact of having a particular disability on individual aspirations. This has important implications for the role of guidance in the curriculum, enabling young people to explore their feelings and concerns as well as having the chance to experiment with new or alternative ideas. Many young people with special educational needs have a very clear understanding of some of the barriers they face in realising their goals. The curriculum should provide strategies to enable them to circumvent or overcome some of these difficulties.

The curriculum also has an important role to play in increasing young people's sense of self-efficacy and personal agency, that is to give them more control over events. An important vehicle for this is the Progress File (formerly Record of Achievement) which can act as a link between the pupil's individual education plan and the transition plan. For example, by taking along their Progress File to transition planning meetings, students can be encouraged to talk about their achievements and parents and other professionals will have a better sense of the young person's progress. Alternative formats, e.g. video, braille, symbols, can ensure that the File is accessible to the learner.

Despite the rhetoric of self-advocacy and pupil involvement in the decision-making process, practice leaves much to be desired. On the whole, decisions were made on behalf of rather than with young people, often driven by assumptions and beliefs about what was best. There are numerous practical ideas and strategies available about how self-advocacy can be promoted through the curriculum. What is perhaps more important is for teachers to become increasingly aware of their own underlying assumptions through self-critical reflection on their practice and, in so doing, to attempt to become more alive to the views and perspectives of young people.

#### *Careers guidance and support*

For some young people, being disabled is an integral part of their identity and they may feel positively, negatively or neutral about themselves as a disabled person or as a member of the disabled community. However, it is not the only influence on them and how they see themselves nor on who they want to become. Disability as one of a number of factors likely to influence their choices post-school needs to be

acknowledged and openly explored through careers guidance and counselling with opportunities to explore ideas about their possible and impossible selves, their fears and hopes, their supports and barriers.

#### *Parent and carer involvement*

Whether professionals like it or not, parents are often the ones who make the decision about what their child will do next and yet many parents in this study reported feelings of frustration because they did not understand what was happening. Having access to information is an important means of gaining more power and influence over events. If, as I have argued, decision-making processes are not logical and rational but often messy and stressful, then parents will require information about the procedures for deciding on post-school options as well as about what options are available. They will need to know what support is available to them throughout the process. A checklist of what questions to ask as well as what happens when, including parents' rights and responsibilities, would be a helpful starting point.

My research also showed that in formulating their opinions, parents tended to rely on informal sources of information such as family friends, neighbours, the media or other parents as well as their own experiences of education and work. Each family is unique and will require different degrees and types of advice and support. They may need reassurance, emotional support and help with beginning to think about the future. Like their children, parents will need objective, accurate information and advice on which to base their decisions and to understand the procedures for making those decisions. Rather than trying to replace these informal networks, support services should explore ways of facilitating the development of community-based networks, for example through setting up networks of parents who have been through a similar process.

#### *Improving procedures*

If transition planning meetings are to assume some significance then professionals need to spend time clarifying how they see the purpose of the meetings. Decisions about what to do after school involve making plans, the outcomes of which are uncertain. Thus one of the purposes of the first meeting in Year 9 will be to begin the process of exploration rather than trying to make a definite decision about where the young person will go when they leave school. The revised Code of Practice has

recognised the shortcomings of the earlier version by recommending that the process of decision-making is an evolving one, in which subsequent meetings are as important as the first one in Year 9.

The conduct of meetings needs to facilitate contributions from all who are present. Circles of Friends have demonstrated ways of shifting control of these meetings to the young people and their families. Careful preparation beforehand, in the young person's home and involving friends and family, enables them to bring a plan to the formal transition planning meeting. Review reports and other relevant documentation should be circulated beforehand. Effective meetings tolerate silences, allowing participants to process information and formulate ideas. Professional jargon should be avoided while the use of open and closed questions encourages contributions and the exploration of options.

#### *The Connexions Service*

I conclude with exploring the potential of the Connexions Service to address some of the issues I have identified in this study. At the level of national policy, and through their Personal Advisers, the Connexions Service is ideally situated to provide what many of the parents in this study said that they wanted – someone who they feel is working for them, rather than having to work to other agendas. Having an identified person to support young people and their families over time and who understands the decisions they were having to make also emerged as an important need. Giving the Connexions Service the power to provide support for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities up to the age of 25, goes some way to meeting this need but this power will need to be widely used if the requirements of many young people are to be met. A key issue here is whether, under the new arrangements, the Personal Advisers will have the necessary backgrounds as well as sufficient time, training and expertise to build relationships with families and their informal networks of support as well as understanding the complexity of the decisions that are having to be made by the young people and their families.

A more fundamental problem relates to the design of the strategy itself. The Connexions Service claims to be a universal service but has been designed to address the needs of young people who are often disengaged and deemed to be at risk of

social exclusion. There is a danger that approaches based on labelling and problematising young people will perpetuate the idea of difference and separateness, thus exacerbating the very exclusion that the service seeks to address. In any case, a number of the young people in my study did not see themselves as having any problems – they identified themselves as young disabled adults who were making choices about what to do and where to go, just like their peers. They were not the problem – it was the attitudes and assumptions of others which sometimes made their transition problematic.

A central aim of the Connexions Service is to broker collaboration between the agencies to increase coherence, but this may do little to alter some of the fundamental legislative and funding barriers that prevent education, health and Social Services from working more effectively together. Social inclusion means more than just enabling access to existing systems and services whether guidance, education, employment, benefits, care, health or housing. It means breaking down the structural barriers that exist within and between services. If the decision-making process is to be effectively supported, what is required is not only someone to connect the services, but for the services themselves to connect with each other and the needs of the young person and their family.

### **The significance of the thesis**

To some extent the significance of this thesis lies in the stories that have unfolded throughout and to draw out particular threads begs the question about the importance of other ideas that have been explored. As I said at the start of this study, none of the research literature to date on career learning and decision-making has included a consideration of the needs and experiences of young people with learning difficulties or disabilities. Yet it is an aspect of provision that has gained increasing significance over the last ten years. At one level what this study has shown is that the factors that influence young people's decisions, e.g. how they see themselves and their aspirations, their interests, aptitudes, family, friends are no different from those that influence other young people and like other young people they do have views and opinions or personal agency which to a greater or lesser extent can influence both the process and the outcomes. What is significant is that both the young people's potential to influence the decision-making process as well as the importance of these influences

on their choices are often ignored. Their learning difficulty or disability becomes the overriding factor in formulating the responses of others towards them. Instead, they and sometimes their parents, some of whom also felt disempowered in the decision-making process, used serendipitous or chance events to assert themselves.

A further significant difference between this study and earlier studies on decision-making is, of course, that the process itself is a public procedure during which decisions are explored and minuted. A plan is formulated listing who will do what, so that often the public process ran in parallel with the private processes. Professionals became more concerned with their roles and responsibilities in the procedures than with the real business of supporting the student in the transition from school. In many instances it appeared as if decisions were made in spite of rather than because of the individual with special educational needs, particularly those with learning difficulties. Many of the decisions they will experience will be imposed from outside, and the danger is that the ordinary ebb and flow of life's events passes them by.

In this research I have also attempted to reach inside the experiences of parents and carers during the decision-making process and to follow it through from their perspective. The coping strategies parents used illustrates the importance of developing support services which are sensitive to the stress that many families experience during the school-leaving period. By understanding more about how parents cope professionals will be able to reframe their responses away from judging or blaming parents towards working alongside them to support young people.



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## Appendices

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## Appendix 1

<p><b>WHOSE DECISION? RESEARCH INTO WHAT AFFECTS DECISIONS AT 14+</b></p>
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*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project on the transition of young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities from school.*

*Lesley Dee*

Following \_\_\_\_\_'s annual review I would be grateful if you would complete the following questionnaire and return your replies to me in the enclosed SAE. All responses will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Role \_\_\_\_\_

1      What did you hope would be decided at the review?

2      From your perspective what decisions were made?

3 What action, if any, do you have to take as a result of the review?

4 How effective was the review in:

<i>(please tick appropriate box)</i>	Very Effective	Satisfactory	Fairly	A little	Not Effective
enabling you to contribute?					
giving you the information needed?					
clarifying what you need to do as a result of the review?					

5 Who or what had the most influence on any decisions that were made?

*Thank you for your help. Please return the questionnaire in the enclosed SAE to Lesley Dee, UCIE, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2BX, Tel: (01223) 369631, Fax : (01223) 369631*

*(LD/MF(gk)-1)*

## Appendix 2:1

### Phase 1

#### Pre – review meeting interview schedule – Parents

##### 1. Background

Family members

X's schooling and reasons for moving

Amount of involvement in schooling

##### 2. Hopes for X in the future

- factors which will help
- factors which will hinder

##### 3. Fears for X in the future

##### 4. Impossible options for X

##### 5. Their view of X's aspirations

- their perception of X's aspirations
- factors helping and hindering their achievement

##### 6. Knowledge of post school options

##### 7. Knowledge of process of deciding on post school placements and appeal procedures and who is involved

##### 8. Knowledge of available support

for X

for them

What support they would like

What support they think they will receive

9. Hoped for outcomes of the review meeting/process

What they think will occur

10. Who or what do you think is likely to have most/least influence on X's future

## Appendix 2:2

### Phase 1

#### Pre – review meeting interview schedule – Students

##### 1. Background

- Can you tell how long you've been at this school?
- What schools did you go to before you came here?
- Why did you leave?

##### 2. School experiences

- What sort of things do you do at school? (Timetable)
- What qualifications do you hope to get?
- Other school based activities
- What do you like/dislike?

##### 3. Out of school activities

- What do you like doing in your spare time? interests
- Do you do any work – if so what?
- Do you go out? Who do you go with? What do you do?
- Can you tell me the names of any of your friends? Where do they live? What sort of things do you do with your friends?

##### 4. (Ambitions for the future)

Do you have any secret dreams or ambitions?

- Have you thought about what you would like to do when you leave school? - further education and training - job
- Where do you see yourself living? – family life – living arrangements - social life - other
- Can you think of anything which might help you to.....
- Can you think of anything which might stop you.....

##### 5. Is there anything that you would least like to happen/scared of happening to you?

6. Is there anything that you think would be impossible for you to do?
7. Who or what do you think will make most/least difference to what happens to you in the future?

## Appendix 2:3

### Phase 1

#### Pre review meeting interview schedule – Teachers

1. Background
  - length of time teaching
  - length of time in particular school
  - length of time working with 14+ age range
2. Role and responsibilities
  - in general
  - in relation to transition planning and the implementation of the COP's recommendations in relation to X
3. Curriculum/careers education
4. Background information on X
  - length of time in school
  - previous schooling
  - reasons for transfer
  - current programme including any externally accredited work
  - parental involvement in programme
5. What do you hope will happen to X when s/he leaves school?
  - supports
  - hindrances
6. What do you fear might happen?
7. What would you like to result from X's review meeting?



8. What is likely to happen in X's review meeting?
9. What information would you like that you do not currently have about
  - X
  - current options for X
  - future options for X
  - anything else
10. Knowledge of where to get information
11. Who or what do you think is likely to have the most influence on X's future?

### Appendix 3

David Francis annual review: 25 March 1997 – 3.45pm

Extract from observation data

SEN Officer (Off)

Careers Adviser (CA)

Bill Francis (BF)

David Francis (DF)

Chair (CH)

Class Teacher (CT)

CH Section 1. This is very positive – in terms of educational progress and socially. One reservation is David's behaviour – outside the classroom there are silly incidents, such as pushing on the stairs. This was written a while before Christmas. The situation is slowly improving – we want it to carry on improving. David needs to be made aware. Everything else is very positive – there are no problems in lessons, he works hard and we're happy with his progress.

CT Are you happy Mr Francis?

BF There's a slight problem with the use of his voice and lip patterns. With David's level of deafness it's not going to help. I know his behaviour has improved.

CH Section 2. Standard para. This outlines provision and the timetable David follows. It covers the same aspects for all students. There is a range of lessons and integration with the mainstream, access to speech therapy. He doesn't require any other provision.

- CH Section 2. Standard set of responses. Nothing to change. We hope he stays here. Sections 4/5/6 same. Section 7.
- CT What about section 4?
- CH Oh sorry. This listed David's educational targets. They are on-going. David has 5 periods of specific language teaching per week. It's on-going in other sessions. It's tied in with speech therapy – will have to try and develop oral skills. Will need it for communication on work experience etc. There has been progress in other subject areas as well. David moved into year 10 where he's following GCSE syllabuses. In years 8/9 there's less emphasis on exams. He needs to be aware of exams. He needs to take more responsibility for his own learning. In the summer term he was entered for RSA. Has he achieved level 2?
- CT I can't remember.
- CH Sections 5/6 – just carry on with those. Section 7. No changes. He's disappplied from MFL and music. Section 8 we're getting into the realms of deciding where he's going when he's finished. He will get advice from Careers/colleges more important. Bring in outside agencies to help him make choices. Year 11 will start visiting colleges.
- CA Met D. in Autumn. I'm new to school. Gave an explanation of role and how careers adviser aims to help them make decisions post year 11. A couple of weeks ago I did a session on NVQs and GNVQs. I explained the differences as preparation for visits to colleges in year 11. There'll be a 3<sup>rd</sup> group session in the summer term. Year 11 will have one to one session –guide him towards most appropriate decision for him.
- CT Ask David what he wants to do.
- D  
(interpreter) Doesn't know.

CA Filled in personal information. He wrote down he wants to be an actor.

CT Wow.

CA We must explore this in depth.

## Appendix 4

### Phase 2 - interview schedule for parents

#### 1. Background - education

Have there been any changes in xxxxxxxxxxxx's schooling/education since we last met?

- content
- location
- support
- residential component
- travel

What caused these changes?

How do you feel these changes have affected xxxxxxxxxxxx?

positive/ negative

How have these changes affected the family ?

positive/negative

#### 2. Background - social and work

Have there been any changes in the family which you feel may have affected xxxxxxxxxxxx?

Have there been any changes in xxxxxxxxxxxx's out of school activities and/or interests?

What caused these changes?

How have these changes affected xxxxxxxxxxxx?

How have these changes affected the family?

#### 3. Aspirations

Last time we met you said that you wanted xxxxxxxxxxxx for xxxxxxxxxxxx. Have you had any further ideas or thoughts?

If you have who or what caused you to modify or change your ideas?

#### 4. Fears

Last time we met you said that you were afraid that xxxxxxxxxxxx. Have these fears changed in any way?

What caused these changes?

#### 5. Impossible options

Last time we met you said you thought that it would be impossible for xxxxxxxxxxxx to xxxxxxxxx. Do you still believe this to be the case? If not, why not?

#### 6. Do you feel you have learned any more about

- what options are available after school? *probe careers*
- the procedures for deciding what happens after school?
- who or where to go for advice and support?

How did you get this information?

#### 7. What do you hope will happen as a result of the next annual review?

What do you think will happen?

## Appendix 5

Mr & Mrs .  
Drive

Huntingdon

December 8, 1995

Dear Mr & Mrs .

Your name has been passed to me by J. . . who has suggested that you might be interested in helping with a project on how young people decide what to do when they leave school. I am particularly interested in some of the concerns and problems you may face and what kind of help and information you would find useful at different stages in the process of your child leaving school.

Although A . . has two or three years before he is due to leave school, I am interested to find out what happens over this period of time and what he will eventually do.

I would appreciate a chance to meet and discuss more about the project. I would hope to discuss your thoughts about A . . 's future. This would take about one hour. At this early stage you may feel unclear and that's very understandable. I believe however your support is likely to be invaluable.

Subsequent to our initial interview, I would like to observe the annual review where . . 's needs are discussed. This would be followed by another short interview with you. Therefore, altogether, it would require our meeting twice a year for the next three years. I would also like to talk to . . twice a year.

Everything you say will be treated in the strictest confidence and nothing will be published without your permission. You will not be identified in any way.

I enclose a slip for you to complete and a stamped addressed envelope for your reply. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Dee, Lecturer

**Please complete and return to Lesley Dee in the enclosed envelope.**

~~I~~ /we \*agree/~~do not agree~~ to be part of this project.

Please \*telephone / write to arrange a time and place for us to meet.

~~I~~ /we would prefer to meet at \*home/~~at school~~/elsewhere.

It is more convenient to meet during ~~the day~~ / in the evenings/ at weekends.

Name .....MRS.....

Address.....

.....CAMBS.....

Tel.no.....

\* Please delete as appropriate

from  
St Ives  
High Street  
2nd left  
follow round  
straight ahead

## Appendix 6

### Questions for Andrew

1. Do you like Derby?
2. Why?
3. What course are you doing?  
Are there any other things you like?
4. Is that what you first wanted to do?
5. If no, what or who made you change your mind?
6. If yes, is it as good as you hoped it would be?
7. What other things do you do?
8. You said you wanted to go to Derby because it was mixed – hearing and deaf. What are the advantages of it being mixed?  
Are there any disadvantages?
9. Was there anything you didn't like about leaving school?  
But do you have new friends?
10. What advice would you give to another deaf person when choosing which college to go to?
11. What do you hope to do next year?
12. What do you hope to do after college?
13. Who or what will help you find a job?
14. What might stop you finding a job?
15. Is there a careers adviser at Derby?
16. Is there anything else you want to say?

Thank you for helping me with my project. Now I am going to write about what I found out about how students decide what to do when they leave school so that I can tell schools and college the best ways to help their students.

The things you have told me will be very helpful.



### Andrews responses

1. Very much.
2. Because I like the course.
3. GNVQ interimate engineers.  
Go out with my friends.
4. No.
5. Because there is no electrical course, so I like work with my hands and I chose engineering.
6. Yes.
- 7.
8. If I go to college for deaf only, then get job in future and I will not feel confidence mixed with hearing, if I go to mixed deaf and hearing college and I will learn more and what they are like. Also I will feel confidence in job in the future.
9. I didn't like to leaving school because I missed all of my friend at school.
10. I will tell them about deaf and hearing mixed.
11. I will do BTEC National Diploma Engineers.
12. Find a job
13. Careers Adviser
14. Maybe it will be difficult for me to find a job because I am deaf.
15. Yes.
- 16.

**Data Collection Schedule****Appendix 7**

<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>
<b>Andrew Bailey</b>			
Student interview	17/1/96	28/2/97	14/3/98
Parents interview	31/1/96	19/11/96	14/3/98
Teacher interview	17/1/96	28/2/96	-
Annual review	19/3/96	4/3/97	-
Observation			
<b>Costas Demetrios</b>			
Student interview	8/3/96	2/12/96	11/5/98
Parents interview	27/11/95	25/5/97	11/5/98
Teacher interview	8/3/96	2/12/96	10/3/98
Annual review	17/6/96	12/5/97	10/3/98
Observation			
<b>David Francis</b>			
Student interview	17/1/96	28/2/97	-
Parents interview	16/2/96	20/2/97	17/6/98
Teacher interview	17/1/96	12/4/97	-
Annual review	Cancelled	25/3/97	3/3/98
Observation			
<b>Gavin Stone</b>			
Student interview	8/3/96	17/2/97	Lost contact
Parents interview	4/96	2/5/97	Lost contact
Teacher interview	5/6/96	17/2/97	Lost contact
Annual review	5/6/96	Cancelled	-
Observation			
<b>James Simpson</b>			
Student interview	6/2/96	28/2/97	20/7/98
Parents interview	13/3/96	5/2/97	20/7/98
Teacher interview	6/2/96	28/2/97	28/1/98
Annual review	24/6/96	20/5/97	17/2/98
Observation			
<b>Kylie Long</b>			
Student interview	17/11/95	9/12/96	16/1/98
Parents interview	-	-	16/1/98
Teacher interview	17/11/95	17/12/96	11/12/97 and 14/1/98
Annual review	-	Cancelled	16/1/98
Observation			

<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 3</b>
<b>Kim Doyle</b>			
Student interview	24/11/95	2/12/96	14/6/98
Parents interview	24/11/95	3/12/96	14/6/98
Teacher interview	24/11/95	2/12/96	10/3/98
Annual review	-	25/2/97	10/3/98
Observation			
<b>Malcolm Lewis</b>			
Student interview	8/3/96	2/12/96	14/6/98
Parents interview	8/3/96	17/6/97	14/6/98
Teacher interview	17/6/96	2/12/96	10/3/98
Annual review	17/6/96	13/5/97	10/3/98
Observation			
<b>Maria Constandis</b>			
Student interview	17/7/96	-	Lost contact
Parents interview	16/3/96	12/6/97	Lost contact
Teacher interview	17/7/96	13/7/97	Lost contact
Annual review	20/6/96	-	-
Observation			
<b>Nasreen Hussein</b>			
Student interview	22/3/96	19/2/97	28/5/98
Parents interview	12/4/96	19/2/97	-
Teacher interview	22/3/96	-	-
Annual review	-	-	-
Observation			
<b>Sandra Harding</b>			
Student interview	6/2/96	28/2/97	1/7/98
Parents interview	25/3/96	21/4/97	1/7/98
Teacher interview	6/2/96	26/6/97	28/1/98
Annual review	23/5/96	13/5/97	17/2/98
Observation			
<b>Stuart Brown</b>			
Student interview	17/11/95	9/12/96	14/7/98
Parents interview	29/11/95	28/11/96	14/7/98
Teacher interview	17/11/95	9/12/96	-
Annual review	n/a	n/a	-
Observation			

### Key

- data not collected due to loss of contact, leaving school, failure to notify or cancellation
- n/a not applicable

**Text cut off in original**

## Lesley Dee

## Transcript of Tape

LD So last time I came you were saying that you hoped that A, could go to a residential place that was opening in Worcester.

LA Yes, that is right.

LD And so what has happened?

LA I was hoping she would go, it was like an option, it would have been the best residential place for her to go to.

LD Right.

LA I mean, the distance is a worry and still is a worry but ....what happened?

LD She had a review....

LA And that was one of our options for her to go down there. Had we found somewhere as good closer, I would probably have preferred that had it been possible but it was a house just for four residents and initially I thought it was six and it is only four so with four I don't think .....the house itself is lovely, the staff appear very keen and genuine which is not what I got where she was previously. Time will tell but it seems like this is going to be it.

LD So, this is the place that you talked about last time I came.

LA Yes.

LD Because ... said, that it was in { } and I thought.....

LA Yes, it is close to ... see I didn't know where it was either initially, it was just like getting - we didn't have the area, we had like Clevedon Court, it was close to St. Paul, close to Worcester. I didn't know exactly where, I knew it was near then I found out later Earcham?

LD so what happened, what led up to, A going as soon as she did.

P. cond. LA What determined it, actually the final pressure was ..... my daughter being scalded at the home.

LD Right, what do you mean told off or burnt?

LA no burnt.

LD Oh no....

LA She was burnt in January, she lost six kilos, more than a fifth of her weight last summer. After the summer review we went on holiday, we came back and it she had gone from 36 kilos - she was 36 kilos when we left mid-July came back in September, gone down to 30 kilos.

LD While you were away on holiday?

LA Yes. So that was the first thing. When <sup>we</sup> she came back she could hardly walk, she was so pale, she was blue, the skin under her eyes.

LD And you didn't know why?

LA Oh yea, no food, I knew why.

LD She wouldn't eat?

LA They weren't giving her enough food.

LD Oh I see, A didn't come with you on holiday?

LA No the holiday is for me to have a break - a total break, I need that break. *I have to have that break & the wife.*

LD So you were away for August?

LA Yes, when I came I didn't pick her up immediately .....so that was another week gone.

LD Right

LA But when she came, I couldn't speak because I was so upset. ....I think had I stayed a week longer she would have ended up in hospital, I really do. She couldn't eat. Her stomach had shrunk so much.

LD Had they got medical help?

LA They were blissfully unaware of it all. He told me <sup>that</sup> I thought she looked really well on the day she came to you - I thought god, what did she look like before. I thought she looked particularly well when she came to you, I nearly died when I saw her. She was really bad, I mean I was worried, I thought is it something else.....by the end of the week with me she had put on weight.

LD Right

LA It was definitely food. *PR* So she couldn't smile or anything at all because she was so weak, she had no energy, she was <sup>drowned</sup> grey, by the end of the week, it took about 10 days with me for her to start smiling and be a bit more like herself and there she was *TR* gradually put on food, because I contacted the Social Services and they had to actually feed her what I was telling them she should eat. But it took Social Services to do that and so we got her weight up but she is still not the weight she was when .....but she is near enough. And then in January she was scalded. They gave her a shower at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, she was crying all day, crying all night, and they didn't realise until 9 o'clock the following morning.

LD ...Why she was crying?

LA I suppose that in a way I don't know, maybe it was a good thing because I thought she has got to get out of there, she has suffered too much.....it wasn't only that, *it was like* they just weren't doing anything, nothing at all. I just had to tell them everything, right *constant* the nagging mother.

LD At the home?

LA Yea.

LD And what about at school, I mean was there any dialogue between the school and the home.

LA Yes, there was, I mean in the home/school book.

LD Were they concerned about her at school?

LA <sup>201 - a bit of wies</sup> Well, I started saying that she has to be fed and Social Services.....with that and they will have to be more careful with her and <sup>interviewed</sup> the school really doesn't care about clothing or about food that much with the home, they are just there for education.

LD Yes, education. But presumably they must have noticed when she came back in September and she had had such a dramatic weight loss.

LA Yes, yes when they brought her to me .... It was a shock.

LD So, then the accident happened in January. So what happened then?

LA Well, meanwhile we had <sup>like</sup> put in an application anyway, I was interested in the home from its conception stage so I had a form ready and had shown an interest from the start but I wasn't sure, but I thought I would see what was happening, I wasn't sure that I wanted her to go that far away. It is three hours, if I go by train it is over three hours from door to door .....

LD And how are you paying for that?

LA The Borough, ... is paying.

LD And was that straightforward?

LA More or less, yes. Where she stayed now <sup>actually</sup> it is quite expensive and considering it was doing nothing.....relatively speaking it is not so expensive because this home is quite expensive for her plus they would have had to pay for the education extra as well. So, the package up there is that it is all in one. I think I have got to clear up .....Social Services, they have had to take her mobility, she will be coming down once a month visiting and that is going to be taken out of her mobility <sup>allowance</sup> and I don't think there is going to be much left really, so if she wanted to go out anywhere, apparently they take the money from the mobility ~~in~~ to take them out.

LD ~~So~~ And the expense of just coming home. Right.

LA We are paying for the hire of the car, driver and petrol and ~~we~~ pay for the escort so it is about £60 one way.

LD Gosh

LA So, when it comes to picking up again that is another £60 so it is over £100 per visit.

LD per visit?

LA Yes, it is a lot of money. I'm wondering how much .....at the end of it, to be able to go somewhere else, to go on holiday, I shall have to speak to my social worker... but it would be ideal if it was ~~Hereford~~shire and not ~~Worcester~~shire. ....

LD So, after the accident what happened then?

LA ..... ~~I mean it never seemed to be the appropriate place for it anyway, they were saying things they were going to do and never did.~~ Oh yes, yes, it will be checked <sup>on</sup> upon ....on the day she was scalded, I saw what was written in her book what she had

DP  
eaten. They are trying to build up her weight now, 2 ozs of cucumber, and a sausage and that was building up her weight! I mean A doesn't like sausages at the best of time anyway, <sup>so we had</sup> it was a between <sup>step</sup> stage until we found somewhere for her. There doesn't seem to be anything that can cater for her really .....

*Life time  
step  
step  
step*

LD So when did she actually leave the school and leave the home then?

LA This past week.

LD Oh, she has only just gone?

LA yes, just.

LD I see, I didn't realise, so she was there <sup>for</sup> just four months after that happened. When I talked to you before although you said you were interested in the residential home you didn't mention it at the review so....

LA <sup>Cos I wasn't... an interest, just</sup> There was just an interest, just to see what it was like.

LD You had heard about it hadn't you?

LA Yes I had heard about it <sup>just</sup> that 'see' kind of thing, but not yes, aim for it, go for it.

LD So, was that the scalding, was that the trigger for you to say I am going to find out about this place, <sup>so</sup> did you go and visit after the event or before ~~the~~ <sup>the event</sup>.

LA After.

LD And did anybody help you at that point or did you do this on your own?

LA I 'phoned up and told the social services, the social worker.....

LD So, you went with your social worker?

LA No, he went a different time, I went after.

LD You both went separately? <sup>to check it out</sup>

LA Yes we went but the building wasn't complete, which having seen it like that I really didn't think it would be ready, that's why I fully intended for A to finish school and then go, I mean that was what I really ....

LD Why did she have to go now? Why did she have to go so quickly?

LA Because the place was open, they would have taken somebody else probably.

LD Oh right.

LA Four residents, they had three and , would be the fourth, I was told there was a waiting list, although I am not sure .....there probably is, I don't know, **so we had to make a decision there and then because this is the kind of home, if we lose it we have lost it. It is for life and that's it.** I also found the chairman who is a **28A** who was actively involved in setting up the home and asked her opinion as well. I said, look, **do you think I should take it** because it is so far away, so she said yes, take it, .....and I know she would have liked her daughter to have gone there and she lives right next door practically..... going up there, **and** I am still anxious I must admit and they are all saying the staff are very good but the staff at **Redhill**.....the people they seemed nice as well, when you speak to them, .....**whatever**, they did look that

*Rhett's Syndrome  
Assessment*

*it really*



FF  
they would be much better than they actually were at the end of the day, so I thought yea, yea, and the person managing both homes saying that we are going to do these books, we are going to do these books that say everything about A, and I said, yes, but that is good but on the other hand if the carers don't read it which <sup>what</sup> was happening with the home here from bitter experience I was telling them and they <sup>just</sup> were saying, I am not doing anything about it and that just is what happened to A because of this basically but I am still worried about her going, on the other hand there was no way that she could stay here, it was not a long term plan. It was .....which is how it began anyway because she was at the age of sixteen, too young to go into adults and that age where she couldn't fit in anywhere really. The home itself is nice, it is a shame that the carers were not capable and not prepared for a bit of effort.

LD You mean at the <sup>home</sup> right.

LA Because the situation and position is ideal ....

LD Had you been able to choose in the best of all possible worlds before it happened what would you have preferred?

LA What she had <sup>3</sup> now, a half an hour away.

LD Right.

LA When the scalding happened, number one, I asked my social worker to put in the <sup>Home</sup> ~~but~~ <sup>showing an interest in the Schofield</sup> but also look for a family, like she had before, she had foster carer but that is really what I wanted for her, I think <sup>(for)</sup>  
PAP-FP/ideal

LD Right, how did that work?

LA That wasn't bad, it could have been better. It was <sup>very</sup> good for A, family unit is ideal for A because she gets the attention she needs and the care. <sup>she needs</sup> It works very well and she came to me, one week in three. The negative side <sup>of</sup> .....had the home belong to ..... I would have felt better whereas it belonged to the family and you were like imposing and you couldn't go and also as a family it was a young couple when this started she had no children but she ended up with two by the time it finished and so these things, <sup>Whereas</sup> like taking A swimming once a week and taking her out, having her own family took up a lot of time and also they were caring for another boy, the husband was caring for the boy and she was caring for A. The boy was a lot of trouble, very very tiring for them which meant that the activities that they should have been doing with A were cut back, that was the downside but otherwise it was good for A, very good, and a residential home with six adults is much too much, <sup>we</sup> four I think is the maximum, so far there <sup>are</sup> only three of them in the home, the fourth will be coming so I don't know how it is going to be with four, but with three, actually three is really good. <sup>I don't know how much its going to affect her with four.</sup>  
LD How often <sup>will</sup> you see her then? / or will you see her.

LA Will I? Once a month at least, I intend going up as much as I can in between so like go up for the weekend for one night and come back. It is so far away, you can't go and come back, you are just shattered to drive up and come back in the evening, it is really tiring, and it is because she is so far I don't feel I want to see her for just two hours and then leave, I spend more time on the road, I spend six hours travelling and two hours to see her.

LD Is there somewhere that you can stay when you go up to see her?

LA Yes, they have got a bedroom in the attic and they have got a double bed <sup>and a</sup> in the shower room, which is now becoming an office, for somebody who works at the Day

Centre will be coming over to do the paperwork <sup>or</sup> whatever, yes there is a bedroom so we can stay the night.

LD Right. So you and your husband go?

LA Yes.

LD How about your other children?

LA Well, this is <sup>a bit of a</sup> ~~the other~~ problem, my son hasn't been yet. We have only been anyway, this is how sudden it is, ~~A~~ <sup>he</sup> has only been twice, the third time to stay, this weekend, we went on a Friday, because it has been really quick. Apparently the other <sup>3, the 2 girls</sup> ~~two~~ have been to the day centre previously quite a few times. I am thinking of taking my son up half term week.

LD How old is he, I've forgotten?

LA He's 15.

LD Right. What do they do during the day? What is the programme?

LA Well, they have a day centre about 15 minutes away, again belonging to the trust. They don't seem to have a particular programme yet. Part of the day centre is seven years old and part of it is brand new so they are beginning to bring in staff for the more severely disabled like ~~A~~, ~~like~~ they have ..... <sup>with lights things</sup> ~~What do they call it ...~~

LD ~~Sensory~~ <sup>Sensory</sup> room?

LA ....it is like a ~~sensory~~ <sup>Sensory</sup> room, yes, which is brand new, that is where she will be going some of the time. I think they will be going out as well, they will be doing some ~~part~~ <sup>painting</sup> work but apart from that I don't know. There doesn't seem to be much else.

LD DE do they go swimming?

LA they will be going once a month.

LD DE I can't remember does she like swimming or not? She didn't like doing exercises.

LA Yes, she hates <sup>yes</sup> ~~physio~~ <sup>when she goes swimming</sup>. She is scared initially but then she relaxes and she is fine and is quite happy, but the initial going into the water, she is a bit anxious.

LD DE And do you know whether information went with her to the home about what she enjoys doing?

LA From school?

LD DE Yes her records of achievement.

LA Yes, it is going to go.

LD DE But they don't have it yet?

LA No. They have got to get it together and they have got to edit the video. A lot of work has been put into .... They have put in the ~~?~~, the managers have put in a lot of work, they have got a lot of information from the parents, from school, like a personal care book together for each resident. **The only problem** is is that you have to refer to it, if you don't then you won't know. So, it is up to the staff.

LD I mean if it works out, is this a place where you hope that A will live for the rest of her life, I think so. Is that how you see her future if it is OK?

LA It is far away but I would like I say, I would prefer it to be closer to home but it really has to be worthwhile and very close. If it is like one and a half hours way, I don't know. The point is cutting her off from everybody now. It is very difficult for anyone to go up there. It is just too far. If it was as far as C that is like a reasonable distance but it is twice as far.

LD It is in the country isn't it? They don't have any other homes do they? <sup>what was the</sup> One at the seaside? <sup>?</sup>

LA No, that was a different one, they didn't cater for .....they have quite a few, they told me where, they have two homes in Scotland, .....If they could come this far it would be lovely.

LD It is interesting that they don't have anywhere over here when it is such a huge conurbation therefore, the incidence is bound to be higher.

LA Exactly, and there is nothing. It is surprising, I <sup>have</sup> ~~am~~ to go all the way up there from London, you would have thought there would have been many more here and you would have to bring those out in the sticks down here sort of thing but it is the other way round.

LD ~~I~~ Presumably one of the differences between the home in E and where she is now living is that it is entirely devoted to the needs of people with Retsyndrome, whereas presumably in the ~~home~~ home there were a number of children of different disabilities. Do you think that is an advantage or disadvantage?

LA I don't think it makes that much difference. Because if you are prepared to do your homework and read up what each individual needs and their requirements are, as long as they are not like....don't have aggressive behaviour. I would rather, the other two residents are in wheelchairs, I would rather for ~~I~~ I would rather they would, or at least one of them was mobile, I would like that more.

LD Why is that?

LA I just feel that they can get close to each other like that and walk up to each other and if you see someone doing something it spurs you on as well I think and like ~~A~~ was in the lounge where one of the other young lady was in her wheelchair, ~~A~~ got up and went straight up to her and they had a good giggle and it would have been so much nicer if she could have done the same. I think it would have been a lot more closeness? or I think it helps because that way you can show affection, whereas it is one sided, because ~~A~~ when up to her and she can't do that.

LD Yes.

LA Do you see and like if ~~A~~ is just sitting feeling a bit miserable, the other girl can't come up to her, and interfere into her thoughts whatever, whereas ~~A~~ went up to her and grabbed her attention and they both looked at each other and it is very very nice but it is like one way now, that she can't do anything, she can't roll her wheelchair up to her or go to her or go to her room whatever so it would have been nice.

LD Yes, I was wondering how you felt about being in <sup>the</sup> community where on the whole there isn't much external contact is there, I mean it is very enclosed.

LA There isn't and the other thing is with the physio as well it would have been more similar whereas the physio they do for the other is very very gentle and where they

PAP (5-2)  
feed them is very gentle but with A you have to be a bit more robust and she likes the more robust people. If you are very gentle with A she won't do anything in the end because she will just take it and be passive. They are gentle as A is more robust and outgoing. She has a lot of movement and if they laid back and put A in a wheelchair, like the others because it is more convenient is a bit of a worry.

LD Do you feel frustrated that you can't communicate with her.

LA With A?

LD Yes, I mean you can't talk to her on the telephone.

LA Well not frustrated but sad. She can hear my voice and you can hear her deep breathing on the other side. I do that with .....on the 'phone, she deep breathes and smiles eventually, she recognises the voice but she can't say anything.

LD No. It is very hard.

LA Yes that's right. It depends on what other people say and having had the experience I have had with this lot it makes you very - it is very back the fact that when I used to phone the home and they said, yes, fine she is OK, you knew she wasn't and yet they were just saying everything is OK and to have to feel like that about someone who is caring for your child and to question and to double check, things they have said, isn't nice at all. You know, they have been proven, the ones at Redhill so often, what they have said is the opposite and then I have had to then check, for example, hospital appointment, they have said, oh yes, we have tried and tried to get her an appointment and we have been unsuccessful and all that and then I phone up and get it immediately and we have never heard, we have never had a phone call, nobody has ever phoned us, you see, to have to know that what they are telling you is absolute 'crap' and you know it and you can't say anything because your daughter is there.

LD Do you know what checks Social Services will make on the home in Evesham. I mean they ought to be making checks on the home in Barnet.

LA Yes.

LD Did they?, Do they?

LA Not really. I mean when she got scalded, when she lost all that weight, they went up and told my social worker about it. You have to make sure that you do this, this and this, it will have to done, no, if the mother isn't there, no, god help the children who don't have somebody there for them, that is all I can say. ....

LD Did you take her out of the home then or did you just have to hope for the best, between January and now.

LA No, stayed there. Yes. But ever since she had lost all that weight. In the first seven days I would keep her two weekends and then she would go back. She would come the Friday.....

LD OK, so you would have her the ten days instead of the seven.

LA Yes, just to boost her weight.

LD So what was the impact of that on the family and you in particular?

LA Very stressful. I think I have been taking the brunt more than the others. I don't know how it effected my son. You know, I asked him once during the .....not

PF -  
fan.

jealous, I can't remember what word.....something to that effect and he said, no, I sometimes wondered but I have stretched myself in that. When A is with me my time is with her but there again that is why we have these summer breaks, to be with our son and when A is not here, it was all for him, especially when he was younger, now he doesn't need me all that much but when he was younger.....it was like splitting myself, going crazy .....it was very hard but it has been hard .....work is extremely stressful, colleagues of mine.....actually feeling sick and not getting rid of it .....and weak, so tired....

LD And exhausted?

LA Oh yes. I am just too tired now. At weekends when I might have crashed out a bit, I was going up to ~~the car~~ it was like packing everything, getting food for the journey not knowing how she would be on the road. I had never taken her on such a long trip anyway.. three hours. The second time we went, we were three hours stuck on the motorway.....(and talking about getting car sick or something (too much background noise)?????.....when she was burnt, I was going around like a zombie, going from work, going up there. I couldn't bring her here because if she had got infected they would have blamed me.....

LD Did they call a doctor.

LA Yes, they took her to a doctor.....when A is hungry she cries and gets really upset .....

LD she can't express it in any other way.

LA She shouts and that is all she can do and they just left her.

LD So, you can only hope that where she is now she is safe.

LA I think she is. I feel she will be. They have got quite a .....staff - had it been just younger staff I would have been more worried because being young they don't offer so much affection. ~~They are at that age that they are not going to cuddle them, that much, whereas the older ones, a lot of them are parents themselves and one said, I would want to treat as if my child was here. I sometimes think that if this was my daughter how would I treat her and that makes me feel that much better. If I was in that job that is how I would feel. I mean things like that I find very reassuring. I let them get on with it and at one point my daughter was crying. She was on the toilet. They have normal toilets but they have this really high one and my daughter can't sit on them and her feet were dangling and she is not used to it, so she was scared obviously and crying. Anyway, we got her off it and one of the staff hugged her and that is the first time I have seen anyway hug her and that really pacified my daughter and I felt better, I mean things like that. As long as she gets her food and show some affection I won't feel too bad about it.~~

RAP -  
FP

LD And some music!

LA Yes.

LD You have to go, I don't want you to be too late. Thanks ever so much for that.

END OF SIDE ONE

- 26/6/97

LD Lesley Dee

SO

LD : has now come into the Sixth Form, so I think in terms of schooling since last term, I think most of that was picked up in the Annual Review wasn't it?

SO Yes, it was.

LD And he's staying - is he staying one night a week?

SO He's staying three nights a week.

LD How do you feel the changes have affected him between moving from <sup>year</sup> the 11 to sixth <sup>form</sup> school? Have there been any changes?

SO Ummm .....He says he prefers being in the sixth form. He likes the fact that he has got more independence and more freedom. He likes going out to the mainstream school and is hoping to do more of that. Personally I feel that it's actually showing up his weaknesses, his very ~~poor~~ self-organisation. x x getting his own work completed and done and someone sitting and structuring it for him I think is actually highlighting the problems. He very much wanted to do an intermediate BTech Business Studies at x x but really he is just not going to be up to it. We are looking at the possibility of him doing Foundation level and it means you are in with Year 10 students, but I think that sort of level is what he's really at, the intermediate.

LD Is he due to leave next year?

SO He's got one more year. He is actually due for major back surgery in a couple of weeks time and I don't know what effect that will have on him when he comes back. If it goes ahead on the date scheduled, which is the 9th July, he will probably be quite incapacitated still when he comes back in September, from what the physios were saying.

LD Why is that surgery necessary - do you know?

SO I think it is because he is very, very bent and x sis. I think it's just to try to straighten him to improve breathing and so on long term.

LD It seems to me there was a tension there between his physical needs and his educational needs.

SO Yes, I think there is. I guess his physical needs have got to take first priority these days.

LD Yes, I know that you were concerned about him not getting his work experience.

SO Yes, in fact he will manage that now because it's next week. He was due for surgery at the end of this week and it has actually been delayed for a fortnight and it might even be delayed until the end of July, but he will definitely get his work experience in. He is going to the Careers Office next week.

LD Did you see 's last year's Transition Plan?

SO Yes.

LD And did you use it in any way?

SO Ummm. Only as a basis where we were heading for looking at what his needs were in general terms. Certainly when I looked at that, it was stating he would like to do business and he was interested in that sort of thing. We were looking at that and I had that in mind when I was looking for at his curriculum structure for this year, but I know he would have liked to have gone out this year almost full time to ~~the business~~, and I did say to him "I think really it's so new for you that you ought to just go with the general group, because they go twice a week and see how you go with that before you trying very much in an unsupportive way".

LD How did he cope with that because it must have been a disappointment to him?

SO I suspect it was, but he didn't show it particularly. I think he accepted it, because he had the carrot of perhaps something later. There is still perhaps something later, it really depends on how physically fit he is in September. Because at the moment he is so independent we don't have to do anything for him in the way of his physical care needs, but after his surgery there will be a few times when he will need support. He won't be able to push himself ~~stand~~ x stand. He may need more help in toileting - we just don't know.

LD Do you see that actually as having an impact on whether or not he can leave?

SO No, no I think the impact will come when we see what kind of placement post-~~leaving school~~ (2) because, obviously, if he hasn't managed to get out to do any foundation business then that's what he is going to be looking at.

LD So would you actually say that his medical needs and his needs for additional care will be one of the overriding factors when he leaves school?

SO No, by that time it should be all right. It will very much determine what happens in September I think. But the indications were that if we can put a lot of input in to building up his upper body strength again, that possibly by Christmas he should be back on course again. Because it might of slewed what he was actually doing. One wouldn't send him out in January, that would be silly. One would be better to consolidate here and then look for a college place.

LD Yes, so it might affect what he does next year?

SO Yes. Initially, yes. We just need to predict just how he will be and now long he will take to recover. It's fairly major.

LD Just going back to the transition planning. How useful do you think it was in planning the programme this year?

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CD-  
T  
SO I think that all transition planning, both at year 10, 11 and in the sixth form, suffers from not having had the careers person there at the transition. Certainly, I've been discussing this with ~~the careers person~~ this week, and trying to work out what the best timings to do them would be, and it just seems completely stupid because at the moment we have extensive planning meetings in year 12 in particular, with most of our students ~~at 12~~ at 12. and they are quite separate. So we're sort of doing the same bit twice. Because having the parents come in to talk about what's going to happen - let's get looking at colleges, let's get looking at whatever else you are interested in. And then we have the statement review. I know that Careers do send a report in, but it's not quite the same as having them there doing it all in one go and thrashing it out.

LD Do you know why they are not there?

SO This current year we have actually—our input from the Careers Service has been a bit hit and miss. ~~The careers person~~ used to be our careers advisor, she was actually promoted to head of service—now, she didn't actually let go of ~~the job~~ and so she was actually doing that as well as her other job. We didn't actually get quite the input of some other schools until this current year when we had (about this time last year) when we had a careers officer appointed.

He was superb. Now he couldn't come to the statement reviews, because that was on a Tuesday and he was actually up doing something at college on Tuesday and so that was very unfortunate. And now he has actually left to go somewhere else. So we have actually got a vacuum this term. s picking up bits. There will be somebody new for September. So hopefully we will be a bit better next year.

LD So, it was not planned to be separate?

SO No, no we would have put—we are trying to put planning in place and, hopefully, next year and we ought to be able to do it all in one go. There is no doubt that we will need further meetings anyway, but at least we are not sort of repeating two quite close together. *CD- CP* actually fell into the hole because he was due to have his big planning meeting with Chris this term and there has been no-one to have it with and so it has just had to go on 'hold'. We didn't actually get around to seeing all of year 12.

LD Do you know if there have been any changes in J... 's home or family circumstances that you are aware of?

SO Not that I am aware of, no.

LD *do you hope* What happens to... when he leaves school?

SO I hope that he will get what he wants which is to do a business course. I hope to get him to a standard where he look for employment in an office. I hope that next week's trip to the Careers Office will actually help him see if that is really what he wants to do.

LD So that would be in the long term that you hope he can do that?

SO Yes.

LD Do you think there is anything that is going to prevent him, hinder him.

SO His literacy skills are not that good. I mean he is below the average for his age. He structures sentences very poorly. He actually organises what he is going to say. I mean, verbally he is very good but when it comes to putting it down on paper he is not that good. He has quite a lot of problems with spelling and so on. I guess his back can be a hindrance. Also, it's going to be whether he is going to be able to organise himself. I think is what is actually offered. I can see him doing wrote tasks- as long as he is given a very clear brief what to do.

LD And what do you think will help him get him where he wants to get to.

SO I think a *residential* x placement that will give him both the educational bits that he wants, plus a high input of independent living skills.

LD And you think that should be a residential placement?

SO I think so.

LD Do you have any fears about what may happen?

*T Combs* SO Yes, I have the greatest fears for... His long term life expectancy—we don't regard spina bifida as being life threatening the same way as some of the others are, but that doesn't mean that potentially there couldn't be problems. I mean the back surgery and straightening his spine and relieving that may help, but it would be difficult to foresee whether his life expectancy will be normal or shortened.

LD Is there any information that you don't have that you want about what's available to him after school?



SO No, I feel pretty clear about that.

LD And also do you feel clear about the procedures for deciding about what happens after school. And finally, procedures for information about who to do to for further advice and help and support for his family? If his family needed extra support.

RR-CR ✓  
SO I think that is something that we don't make clear enough to parents. We always say there will be the Careers Officer who will be at our consultation evenings and we have these planning meetings in year 12 and we will say that they will still carry on liaising etc., etc., etc., but I get the feeling that it's not that clear who does what. And even looking beyond—it comes as a great shock to parents to realise that therapy information is not readily available etc., etc., and I don't think it is really spelt out early enough exactly what is going to happen.

LD So are you going to change that?

LD - T  
SO Well, I hope so. We have started discussing this that when it comes back to making sure that we get better liaison in the transition meetings with the Careers Service, but not wait until year 12 - come in earlier. We need to be much more clear much earlier on what the options are. John has been quite clear what he wants and it's been quite OK to leave it until this stage, but he has been quite determined. There are other students who have been less capable.

LD So there will be one more annual review. So what do you hope will happen as a result of that?

SO Well, the next annual review will really only be sort of rubber-stamping things I think. What we are discussing is actually changing the timings so that in the future we will hopefully have the year 12 annual reviews in the summer term and then that will set the target, plus all planning processes and everything else to do the final year, so that if there is another meeting, which is not really a statement review as such, because they will ultimately be setting targets for 12 months if they are going and they will just be picking up any oddments and try to put the timing better.

LD But you do have them in the summer term at the moment for year 12?

SO Not all of them.

LD Oh. I see.

SO It's some. John's - they were fine - that was the right time for them, the earliest one was last September.

LD So are you going to try and do that right through the school so that you will always have all of them right through the summer term?

RRRe  
SO No, it's going to change - slightly stagger them as they come up so from year to year. I mean I think it's important that we have the year 11's quite early on as well. It's sort of from the transition one's onwards where they need to be slightly pushed along the year each time. So you would see that as both reflecting on what's happened and then planning your next year? Is that what you want to do?

SO Yes. You see, their exams were fine, they were exactly at the right sort of time because we reviewed what had happened since they went into the sixth form and we really ought to give them a good crack at the change to actually review how they adapted to that and then it's also very important to think very clearly for the final year that they are going to be here of what we are actually doing to support leaving.

LD Yes, because presumably the whole of the final year is taken up with that?

SO Yes, it's all the planning of where they are going to go and then once the decisions have been made, making sure that they feel confident about what's going to happen to them.

## Start List of Codes - Definitions

*Unless otherwise stated the following relate to the views of young people, parents/carers and professionals.*

### Decision Making (*DM*)

* <i>DM</i> - <u>MOTIVATION</u>	Preparedness for taking responsibility for a decision.
<i>DM</i> - <u>INFORMATION</u> - <u>OPTIONS</u>	Information regarding available options.
<i>DM</i> - <u>INFORMATION</u> - <u>PROCEDURES</u>	Information regarding transition planning procedures.
? <i>DM</i> - <u>CHOICE</u> - <u>CRITERIA</u>	Acceptable, minimum criteria.
<i>DM</i> - <u>CHOICE</u> - <u>INFLUENCES</u>	Influences on choice.
* <i>DM</i> - <u>AMBIGUITY</u>	Failure to recognise choice making situation exists.
<i>DM</i> - <u>UNCERTAINTY</u>	Indices of uncertainty over the decision.
<i>DM</i> - <u>SUPPORT</u>	Nature of support needed/provided.
<i>DM</i> - <u>TIME</u>	Factors relating to the passage of time/chronology of events.
<i>DM</i> - <u>REVIEWS</u> - <u>EXPECTATIONS</u>	Expectations of the reviews in supporting the decision-making process.
<i>DM</i> - <u>REVIEWS</u> - <u>USEFULNESS</u>	Usefulness of reviews in decision-making process.

## Street Level Bureaucrat (*SLB*)

<i>SLB</i> - <u>RESPONSIBILITIES</u>	Extent of professionals current responsibilities.
<i>SLB</i> - <u>RESOURCES</u>	Indices of demand for and access to resources.
<i>SLB</i> - <u>REGULATING</u>	Indices of methods of modifying or regulating demands of others.
<i>SLB</i> - <u>MODIFYING</u> - <u>CONCEPT</u>	Indices of ways in which concept of role is modified.
<i>SLB</i> - <u>MODIFYING</u> - <u>CLIENT</u>	Indices of ways in which extent of client group is modified.

## Family System (*FAM*)

<i>FAM</i> - <u>ENVIRONMENT</u>	The pattern and organisation of the family, including psychological and sociological factors. <i>employment</i>
<i>FAM</i> - <u>TRANSITION</u>	Indicators of family structures being reappraised and possibly changed - anxiety, rethinking priorities, upheavals.
<i>FAM</i> - <u>ATTITUDES</u>	Family attitudes towards disability/learning difficulty of the child
<i>FAM</i> - <u>ECOLOGY</u> :	
- <u>TYPE</u>	Range and type of formal and informal support networks.
- <u>INTERACTION</u>	Nature of relationship with support networks.
- <u>IMPACT</u>	Indices of impact of national policies/trends.

## Possible Self (*PS*)

### *PS* - ASPIRATIONS:

- JOB Aspirations related to future work.
- ACCOMMODATION Aspirations related to future living arrangements.
- FAMILY Aspirations related to future family life.
- MATERIAL Aspirations related to future material possessions.

### *PS* - FEARS

Fears about future life.

### *PS* - STRATS - CURRICULUM

Curriculum related factors which provide strategies for helping to clarifying or working towards aspirations.

### *PS* - STRATS - EXAM

Knowledge of qualifications or training required to pursue aspirations.

### *PS* - POSITIVE POSSIBLE SELF

Students' positive views of themselves in the future.

### *PS* - NEGATIVE POSSIBLE SELF

Students' negative views of themselves in the future.

### *PS* - SCOPE - LDD

Factors relating to students ldd which are perceived to modify the individuals. scope for development / achievements

### *PS* - SCOPE - IMP

Aspirations/achievements perceived to be impossible.

POS. P.S. POS-NEG-PS.

## Appendix 11

### Case study - A.

#### Background information

DOB 26. 05.81

School : day and residential school for deaf and hearing impaired . Secondary department based in local secondary school. Alex is a weekly boarder and lives in a neighbouring county.

#### Interview 1 - A 17.1.1996 Year 10

Alex says that he wants to become an electrician when he leaves school and he later revealed that this was what his father was. He spends time at weekends helping his father. At school he enjoys practical and somewhat related subjects - science, design and technology, maths, woodwork. His hobbies in his spare time reflect similar interests - computers, making things. At weekends when he goes home he spends time with his cousins.

He had some idea about the subjects he would need to study in order to become a qualified electrician and that he would need to go to college. He assumed however that this would be residential and he was unaware of the existence of local colleges. He wanted to take time to decide on the best college for him, to 'have a look around.' His father would be his main source of support in becoming an electrician although this was not the same for other jobs, where he felt that college would then provide most support. He also felt his parents would help him choose the most appropriate college and course although he then mentioned his teachers as well.

When asked about any secret dreams or aspirations he had he said he wanted to become famous through becoming a filmstar but that this was not possible because of his deafness, as he could not speak. He was not aware of any of the films which had featured deaf actors.

#### *Main themes*

Influence of father on aspiration

Match between interests and possible career route

Parents seen as main source of support for becoming electrician

Parents also seen as main influence on choice of course and college

Teachers and college mentioned after family as sources of help and guidance.

Knowledge of options limited to residential college

Disability as an obstacle to realising dreams

#### *Speculations and explanations*

What is the nature of the influence of Alex's father on his ambition to become an electrician? As a role model?

What part does disability play in influencing choice? Is the fact that Alex did not know that there were local colleges a direct result of the expectation of his special school that pupils generally go on to specialist residential colleges?

#### *Links to substantive theories*

Alex's view that his family are likely to be most influential on his choice of course and college is in line with the findings of Taylor (1992), who found that families were cited as the main informal source of advice and guidance by young people. Foskett and

Hesketh (1997) also identified families as important catalysts in the choice making process although they argued that their influence seemed to be more covert than overt for their sample of 1284 year 11 pupils and that formal sources of advice and information such as teachers and careers advisers were more significant. However their study relied on young people's retrospective views and findings from this study need to be treated with some caution.

Not being able to become a filmstar or become famous because of his hearing impairment may be part of the process of what Gottfriedson (1981) refers to as defining a Zone of Acceptable Alternatives and Hodkinson et.al. (1996) horizons for action. These are limits or boundaries which govern possible career options which are determined either internally by the individual or externally. In this case *Alex* determined that his disability would not allow him to become a filmstar.

### *Links to meta - theories*

### *Methodological issues*

As I am unable to sign the teacher had agreed to interpret for me. However as she was late I decided to write down the questions for *Alex* to answer. This worked well and we began to develop a written conversation in which he also asked me questions for clarification. However the teacher then arrived halfway through the interview and her personal style and status did alter the dynamic of the interview and created a barrier between *Alex* and myself. After that the quality of the information felt diluted.

### **Interview 1 - Mr and Mrs                      February 1996**

Mr and Mrs                      felt that when *Alex* was in primary school they had taken sole responsibility for his education and ensuring that his needs were met. they had pressed for him to be moved from a unit in a local primary school to a special school because his teacher was not a qualified teacher of the deaf. Now however his mother felt that *Alex* can help by communicating his needs to them. His mother had said that she thought it was too soon to begin to think about *Alex*'s future but when pressed she said that her ambition for him was to be happy.

In spite of his mother's comment that it was too soon to begin to think about his future his parents said that they had begun to talk to him about what he might do although he frequently changed his mind. They are concerned about the possibility of his being socially isolated in a hearing environment and Mrs                      had reservations about the provision at their one of their local colleges where a friend of hers worked. She said

*I began to learn different stories about it. and I think it is a normal college but there is a group of people she (her friend) works with a few of them are deaf and the rest aren't but they are all what we call mature students, I think, not sixteen to eighteen ones. I think they tend to be twenty up to thirty and they are all mentally retarded and some of them just happen to be deaf as well and I thought if that is the only facility .....I don't agree with them all being in a class together'.*

They have discussed the relative merits of two residential specialist colleges with the *Alex*'s teacher who had recommended *College* as he will have the opportunity there to work alongside hearing students at a local college. They did not have any information about how the decision would be made or about what options would be available. At this point in time it was likely that the school would cancel annual review because no one from the LEA could attend. They did have some knowledge of sources of support through talking to other parents and they knew about the careers service through the experiences of their older son although they were unimpressed.

They feel that the main influences on Alex's decision will be his teachers and what his friends do. His mother is particularly concerned about the potential for Alex to become socially isolated. Although he told me that he goes out with friends at home this is apparently not true and he has no friends in the locality apart from an older boy who lives nearby and attended the same school. Mrs. [redacted] mentioned the possibility of him joining a local deaf club but the teacher had said that most members of these tended to be older.

They are worried about the next transition and reflected that they had established a good routine which was now about to be disrupted because Alex has to leave school. But they were generally optimistic that because Alex is an outward-going and bright boy he will manage the transition well.

#### *Main themes*

Sources of information were friends, other parents, family members and the school

Feelings of responsibility and inadequacy in not being fully appraised of options

Sceptical about quality of support from social and careers services

Impact of special school on friendship networks

Social isolation of deaf people.

Anxieties about change

#### *Speculations and explanations*

#### *Links to substantive theories*

Their wish for their child to be happy rather than holding some specific goal is similar to Hodkinson et al's (1996) findings that parents whose children were on a youth training programme were most concerned about them being exploited.

Their feelings of anxiety about how they will cope with the impending changes are reinforced by Pell and Cohen's (1995) observation that "transition periods are characterised by upheaval, rethinking of prior commitments, and anxiety about change. As a result, those times hold a greater risk for the disability to become unnecessarily embedded or inappropriately ignored in planning of the next developmental phase." The extent to which either of these things are likely happen is not clear however.

But there are also possible connections here with what Hodkinson describes as periods of routine disturbed by transformative events or turning points. In this case the turning point is a *structural* turning point in that Alex has to leave school.

Despite of conversations about options at school local colleges had not been discussed as a viable alternative. School controls information but is this information deliberately withheld? It seems more dependent on custom and practice and what Hoyle (1988) terms the micro-politics of the organisation. The school has longstanding links to the residential college and traditionally the vast majority of their school leavers went on to one or other of these colleges.

#### *Links to meta theories*

#### **Interview 1 - Teacher**

#### **Missing**

### **Annual review - 19/3/96**

The review was held after all and was attended by Alex, both his parents, a representative from his authority's deaf support service, teacher and a communicator.

The teacher read through Alex's report occasionally asking if there were any comments. When it came to discussion about Alex's future the teacher said that he wanted to become an electrician and follow in his father's footsteps, at which everyone laughed. However she went on to say that he had not decided whether he wanted to go to his local college or residential college. However in the discussion that followed it seemed that residential placement was the preferred option. Words such as 'fight' and 'nightmare' were used. Mrs [redacted] said that she preferred the residential option because Alex would not be so isolated socially. She said she was prepared to be surprised by the quality of provision at a local college but after his experiences at primary school she was not convinced. Alex was to do work experience in a bank. His mother asked questions about how he would communicate and travel arrangements.

The Deaf support teacher was uncertain about arrangements for transition in his authority and said he would arrange for his head of service to contact Mr and Mrs [redacted]. Mrs [redacted] suggested that something about wanting to go to college should be written on the statement review.

#### *Perceptions of the meeting*

There was general dissatisfaction on the part of the Mrs [redacted] and her husband as well as Mrs Stacey about the quality of information available to them at the review because the LEA representative did not have the information they required. Both parents and teacher felt that the meeting was effective in enabling them to contribute but unlike Mrs Stacey the parents did not feel clear about what they were supposed to do next. For Alex this was the first he had attended and he said he had enjoyed finding out 'what it is about'.

#### *Main themes*

Difficulties in liaising with out-county personnel

Involvement of deaf and hi students in annual reviews

Implicit decision-making

Parents not clear about the next steps

### **Interview 2 - Mrs [redacted] 19th November 1996**

Mrs [redacted] was rather withdrawn at the start of the interview but gradually began to open up. (see methodological issues) Alex had been to visit the two residential colleges but was yet to visit the local ones. He had rejected [redacted] because they did not do the course that he wanted. Mrs [redacted] went on to discuss Alex's wish to pursue a career in electronics. She admits that he is already quite skilled and has a real interest and commitment to the area. She said,

*John does a bit of casual work at weekends, he has been doing the electrics in this barn and the farmer took him out burning potato tops the other Saturday after [redacted] and when they got back one of the rear lights on his trailer wasn't working and [redacted] noticed it wasn't working and as soon as they got back he went and got his tool box and within about two minutes he got it working again. So he has got an interest and it is not just because it is what John does because he does enjoy it. He likes doing all the drawing and everything. June (his teacher) was quite surprised that he was that practical at home."*



She went on to describe her worries about A. being able to get a job as an electrician because of his deafness but she had been partially reassured by A. 's teacher who had said that the college would not provide training if there was not a realistic chance of students progressing into jobs. However the college which A. had liked were about to offer a two year course which included some electronics and so they had discussed how they might get him to change his mind about doing a pure electronics course.

She said she was feeling much more supported now and understood the process much more clearly but that she wished she had known earlier what to expect. However she was confused about the selection process and the need for pupils to have particular grades in order to secure a place. What will happen if they do not get the required grades? And what do the different examinations mean? What help is he entitled to? Are the papers exactly the same for all pupils?

The importance of networks of support between parents was reinforced by her comment that she had in many ways done the spadework for her friend with a deaf child who she would now be able to advise. However she was still confused over what support A. and they were entitled to from social services, particularly in terms of benefits and equipment, and where to seek for information about social activities for A. He is still shy and this aspect is an important consideration in where they want him to go on to after school.

*" I mean, it's just that he won't go out. I don't want him running round the streets at night but during the day during the summer holidays he just doesn't go out, like down the park or anything. But then again I suppose you can understand it. if you are an odd one out anyway, it is more difficult to go down the park and play with a load of kids, it is no different from a hearing child I suppose."*

Following the last annual review meeting there had been no communication from the LEA representative as had been promised. Mrs A. said she had felt sorry for him and that their area of the county was generally neglected by the city based services. Her main source of support was from A. 's teacher.

#### *Main themes*

Sources of support for parents

Problems of communication related to out-county pupils

Not knowing what you don't know

Advice and support on social activities

Timing of information about transition arrangements

Access to employment and disability

Development of individual interests

#### *Speculations and explanations*

Although Mrs A. said that she did not really know what she didn't know and this made asking questions difficult with a little prompting she was soon able to articulate a great many questions. This has been the case in other interviews and leads me to reflect on the nature of the process in which we were involved which was essentially relaxed and not restricted by time. On the other hand we had begun to build up a relationship over time and I had met A. and visited the school. So that when parents say but I

don't know what to ask it may be that they feel their questions are not worth asking or that they would be expected to know.

#### *Links to substantive theories*

A number of parents have spoken of not knowing what they don't know and therefore not being able to ask for advice and information. Is this a way of professionals subconsciously or consciously controlling their workloads because if information is not given about what is possible then demands on their time and resources will necessarily be reduced. (ref street level bureaucrats Lipsky)

#### *Methodological issues*

Mrs Ashby asked me for advice about a letter she had received from social services and what she should do about it. It was important for me to respond to this because we could share our dismay at its tone and contents. Once I had done this she became much more responsive. Later in the interview she raised issues about the selection procedure and the grade requirements listed in the prospectuses. I realised that she was reading the mainstream college prospectus and felt I had to spend time explaining the different prospectuses to her.

#### **Interview 2 - Alex 28.2.97**

Alex now goes out with his father every Saturday helping him with his electrical business. He says he also spends time with his friends mentioning by name the one boy from his village who also goes to his school. Alex still would really like to become a film star but also an electrician. He has visited four colleges, two near his home and two residential. He preferred the college where there were opportunities for deaf and hearing students to mix through attending local college courses. In one of the local colleges he had visited the one electrical 'course was very small' and in the other he would have been the only deaf person in the college although he thought the course itself was alright. He felt that in deciding where to go the most important consideration was the quality of the course itself and then who he would be with in the college. He was not happy to be "on my own" meaning the only deaf person. According to Alex his parents felt that the one year courses offered by the local colleges were not long enough.

Alex would now like to learn to drive in the future and would like to live on his own. He considers his annual reviews to be rather boring as he has now made up his mind what he wants to do when he leaves school.

#### *Main themes*

Has two aspirations of different orders

Decision-making processes - a year ago he felt that his parents would be most important influences but by now he feels that he is making the decision and social reasons were important to him. This is supported by Ash et al. (1997) who in their study of disabled students attending sector FE colleges found that the social aspects of college were at least as important to them as the courses they were following.

#### *Explanations and Speculations*

Is Alex's insistence that he spends time with friends at home something he thinks he should say? Not to have friends at home is perhaps an admission of failure and difficult to bear.

The odds seem to be building up against the local option if indeed they were ever a possibility

#### *Links to substantive theories*

Alex's decision was based on an apparently logical process of exploring his options and matching them against his two important criteria which were the quality of the

course and his desire to work alongside both hearing and deaf people. The social side of his potential learning environment was as important as the academic considerations. In their research Foskett and Hesketh (1997) found that academic reputation was an important deciding factor in young people's decision-making.

### **Annual Review 2 - 4th March 1997**

Alex had by this time visited local and residential colleges and had been offered a place at the college he had originally chosen. He had not enjoyed the visit to one of his local colleges because everyone was hearing and he prefers a mix of deaf and hearing people. There was some debate about what Alex would do and Alex confirmed that he wanted to take up the place at the residential college to do electrical engineering and not the wider taster course he had been offered. It was therefore agreed that a letter confirming this would be sent to the college and an application would be sent to the FEFC.

However a complication then arose because one of the local colleges offered the same course and the college deaf support co-ordinator had confirmed that they would like him to go to the college. This was a problem as a letter has to be sent by the local college saying that they cannot meet the students needs which is then used as evidence in support of the residential placement. What will they do? Both his teacher and the careers officer said that they must emphasise Alex's social needs in their application and the importance of him being able to communicate with other deaf people. Furthermore his teacher was concerned that local colleges would not have staff available with a sufficiently high level of signing.

The meeting then returned to Alex's choice of course. It became clear that Alex did not understand the term GNVQ and whether this was the same as the engineering course he said he wanted to do. His parents raised concerns about restricting his options by focussing down on a particular route too soon. However Mrs Stacey the teacher reassured them all that he would be able to switch routes at half term if he was unhappy with either choice.

### *Perceptions of the meeting*

The careers officer who had not met Alex before found the meeting very effective. However she felt that careers interviews, visits to colleges and Alex's school had all influenced his decision. From her perspective the main decision made at the review was Alex's choice to follow the GNVQ Intermediate Engineering course.

### *Main themes and issues*

Review meeting used as a vehicle for discussing options with Alex. This did not seem appropriate as he became confused and he was being given information and asked to make choices in a large meeting. What are the purposes of annual reviews? Are they an appropriate forum for this kind of debate and discussion?

If not what should they be used for?

How can their management and conduct be improved?

Use of combative language again with reference to the FEFC e.g. 'cover our tracks'

### *Links to substantive theories*

see below

### *Links to meta-theories*

The decision-making process is influenced by wider policy issues. The FEFC regulations which are governed by the 1992 FHE act requires certain procedures to be followed when decisions are being made about post school destinations. Specialist college placements can be requested when sector colleges do not have appropriate facilities and where the students 'best interests' will not be served. What 'best interests' means is open to dispute. But what is clear is that the issue of power and power relations becomes very important as different stakeholders choose to interpret 'best interests' in very different ways. Hodgkinson cites Bourdieu's concept of *field of forces*

in pointing out that although legal niceties may govern the operations of the *field* 'it is the state of the relations of force between players that defines the structure of the field' ( Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992)

### **Interview 2 - Teacher April 1997 - Mrs Stacey**

We discussed the difficulties the school encountered in getting careers officers to attend annual reviews of pupils who are out-county, many of whom no longer come as the result of cutbacks and instructions not to attend. From Mrs Stacey's point of view their role appears increasingly as an administrative function rather than one concerned with offering guidance and support to individuals.

Mrs Stacey was pleased with the outcome of the review because she felt that options had been opened up for Alex. She was anxious that Alex had not had a careers interview and up to that point none of the formal application procedures to the FEFC had begun. It had been difficult to get any information and time was passing.

She found it difficult to say who or what would have the most influence on Alex's final decision. She said

*'I don't know really. I don't know, I have to be honest with you. I am not quite sure, because he is a strong, independent lad and he does make up his own mind. I know he talks to Mum quite a lot and I know that Mum will say something to him and he turns round and says "Oh! Dear". So I don't know whether I have any influence.'*

When asked whether she thought that Alex's mother had more influence than his father she continued,

*Oh no I don't think his father has less influence than his mother, I think the fact that his father is an electrician has influenced him in terms of the sort of career path he wants to take he goes out with his dad and he likes to help him .....he has found something that he is interested in. He has actually found something he is good at and that helps in terms of talking about things at home.'*

While Mrs Stacey saw Alex progressing into employment she was not convinced that he would get a job as an electrician because of the attitudes of employers. This viewpoint contradicts the advice which she reportedly gave Mrs Ash last year.

We discussed her management of the meetings which she said she found difficult. It was difficult to both contribute, sign and facilitate the proceedings. She had not received any training and she was very aware that everyone had their own agendas which may not necessarily coincide.

#### *Themes*

Role of professionals and inter agency working

Family influences on career aspiration

Personal interests and strengths matched to potential career options

Impact of changes in policy on the role of Careers service

Conduct of annual review meetings

Advocacy and self advocacy

The nature of careers guidance

## Experiences at local college and impact on choice

### *Explanations and speculations*

Difficulties of Careers Officers in finding time to work with out county pupils and to attend their annual reviews could explain why A's careers officer used the last meeting as an opportunity to offer guidance to A in a way that created difficulties for him. This also means that parents do not have opportunities to ask questions or explore their anxieties in a more relaxed or private venue in a way that Mrs A demonstrated the need for.

Mrs Stacey's concerns that A may not get a job as an electrician contradicts the advice she reportedly passed on to Mrs A earlier in the year about relying on the college not to provide training for which there was no career route.

### *Links to substantive theories*

Gottfriedson's theories about career match

## **Interview 3 - Alex - March 1998**

I interviewed Alex during his Easter holidays. He is now attending a specialist residential college - his first choice and the option that was discussed at the last annual review meeting. As it turns out he is not doing electrical engineering but a GNVQ Intermediate in engineering which is broader than he originally wanted. There is no electrical engineering course available to him. He likes the college because of the course and because he can go out with his friends. When asked about the advantages of going to the college he wrote

*If I go college for deaf only then get job in future and I will not feel confidence mixed with hearing. If I go mixed deaf and hearing college and I will learn more and what they are like. Also I will feel confidence in job in future.*

Next year he will progress onto a BTEC National Diploma in Engineering. He is uncertain about getting employment after the course because of his deafness.

### *Explanations and speculations*

Alex although content was not doing the course he had originally said he wanted to do. It may well be that the college does not offer electrical engineering because of the safety issues. When I first interviewed Alex two years earlier he said he could not see any reasons why he could not get a job as an electrician but now he felt that his deafness may be a barrier.

From the language he uses in referring to hearing people 'on my own', 'learn what they are like', he sees them as a distinct 'other' group of which he is not a member though he recognises the need to become more confident in his interactions if he is to get employment.

### *Links to substantive theories*

Gottfriedson (1981) Alex's views and perceptions changed as possibilities were modified by what was on offer and his wish to be with hearing and deaf people.

## **Mr and Mrs Ashby March 1998**

They are pleased with the way Alex has settled down at Derby but concerned about the lack of supervision of his social life because students are left very much to their own devices at weekends. As planned he is doing the GNVQ intermediate course which contains a little electrical engineering but no electronics. He will begin to focus later. He did not take up the taster course although the option to do so was one of the arguments he used to support his application in favour of Derby to the FEFC. The application had not been straightforward as one of the local colleges had said that they could meet his

needs although they did say that there were no other deaf students taking the course. Mrs Ashby describes what happened as follows

*Well nobody was offering electrical installation which was obviously what he wanted to do. Nobody was offering that at all. But when he went to Derby and they said he could do this (taster course) that was it...we used the excuse that Cambridge could do the general engineering the same as Derby but that Derby were also offering this foundation course which he could do for six weeks it start with if he wanted to. This way he could do a bit of everything and then decide after the first half term which he did. This was actually what he wrote in his little letter. Alex said he was probably better to do that because he really didn't know what he wanted to do...*

When pressed again about the reasons for choice of college Mrs Ashby said that it was not so much having access to social activities with deaf people that they felt was important for Alex but studying alongside other people with whom he could freely communicate. They felt now that he would have made friends where ever he was. Mr Ashby was less concerned by Alex's freedom than his mother.

They would have liked to be reassured about the process of choosing options after school much earlier than happened. Mrs Ashby felt that as soon as Alex had started secondary school it would have been helpful to know and would have prevented their worrying quite so much. She went on

*I mean you think about each stage as it comes and I really didn't think about it and when I started to think about it I started to get a bit panicky about it. 'What am I going to do?' It all sort of fell into place ...sort of mapped out for us which was a grate help. But then as I said I could have asked for it but I didn't. I didn't ask for it because I didn't know there was any reason to ask.*

Reflecting on the future his father felt that the disability Discrimination Act may be helpful in getting Alex into employment as well as his own contacts and networks. His father sees the main goal as getting him into employment and was unconcerned as to whether that was near home or in Derby. His mother on the other hand would like him to return home after three years while Alex has expressed a wish to go on to university.

#### *Main themes and issues*

Influence of FEFC on choice - strategies for imposing own choice

Importance of family networks

Possible benefits and impact of policies

Timing of information to parents

#### *Explanations and speculations*

*Links to substantive theories*

*Links to meta-theories*

#### **Summary**

So in the end Alex went to the college which had been suggested by his teacher two years earlier and which was in keeping with his own preference to attend a mixed hearing and deaf college. It also satisfied his parents concerns about social isolation although his mother now had some concerns that he was becoming too sociable! He had had to broaden his choice of course because electronics courses were not available

but he was seeing his career learning path as much longer by considering university and focussing down later.

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## Appendix 12

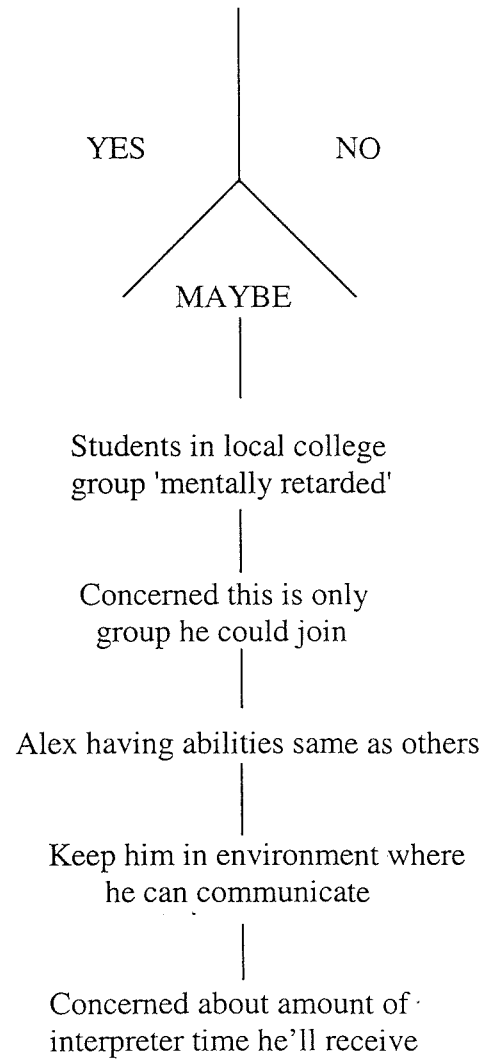
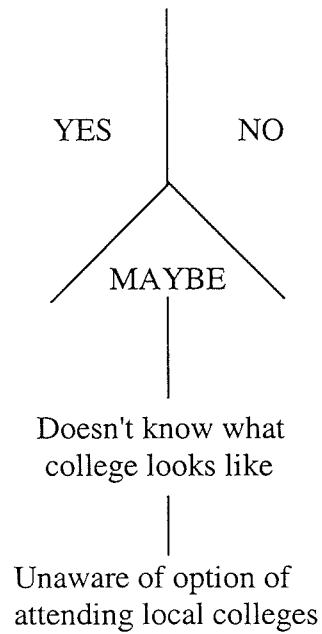
### Decision-making tree

Wave I

Go to residential college/Do not go to residential college

Andrew

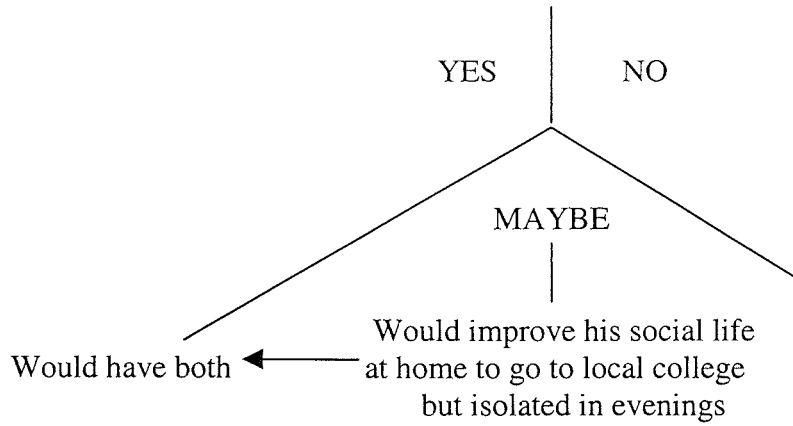
Mr and Mrs Bailey





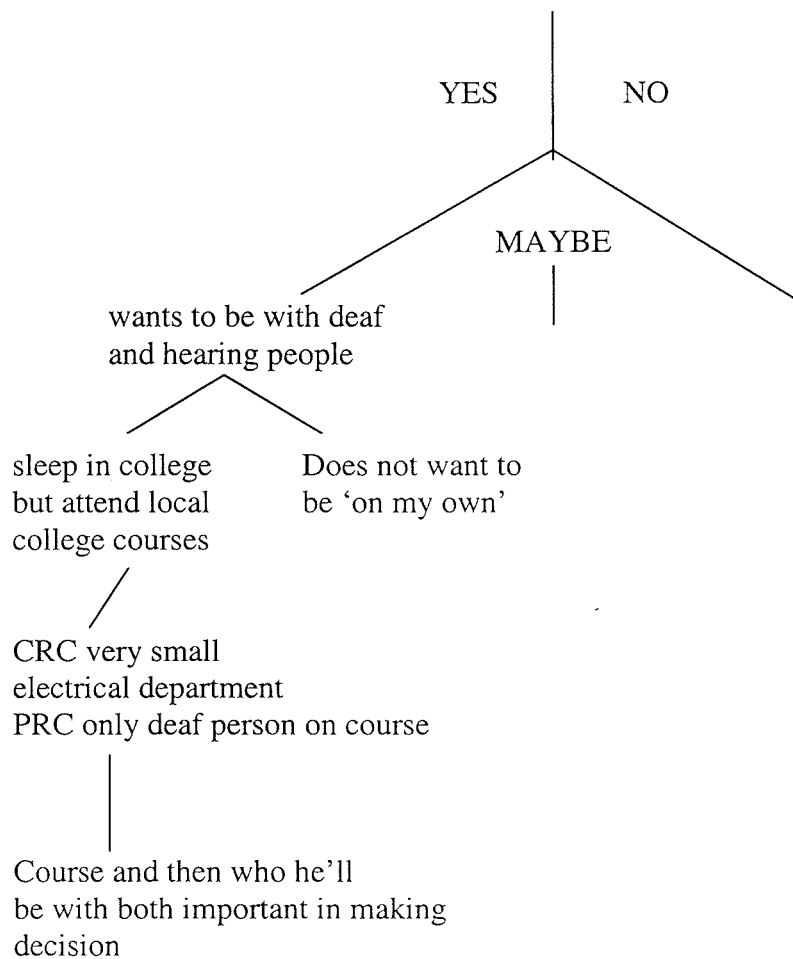
**Wave II      Go to residential college/Do not go to residential college**

**Mr and Mrs Bailey**  
**Nov 1996**

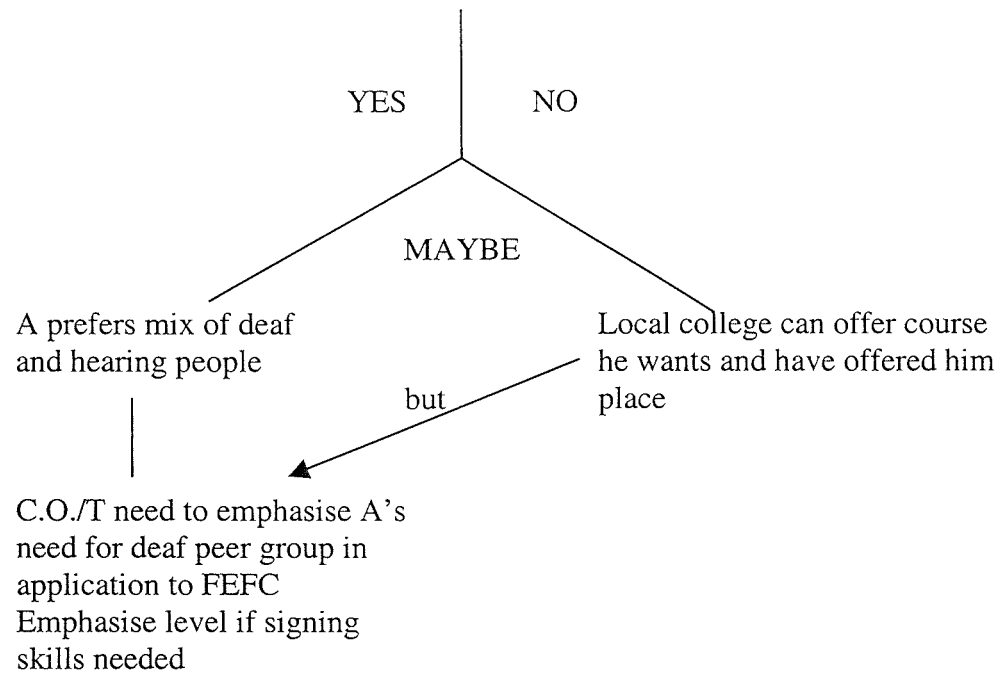


Note: Has visited 2 local and 2 residential colleges

**Andrew**  
**28.2.97**



Review  
4.3.97



# Appendix 13:1

## Event / Response analysis

Case Study: Andrew

Decision no.1: Go to residential college /  
Go to local college

Decision-making unit		Time 1: 1995/96 P: 2/96 A: 1/96 TOPS: 3/96	Time 2: 1996/97 P: Nov'96 A: 2/97 TOPS: 3/97	Time 3:
Self	A		Visited local + residential colleges	A. goes to residential college
	R	A says doesn't know what college is like and is unaware of local colleges	A prefers residential college. Not happy to be 'on my own' even tho' local college offered right course.	
Parents	A	Friend works at local college with special needs students	A. had rejected Domestic 'did not do what he wanted'. Still to visit local	
	R	A needs to be with intellectual equals + those he can communicate with	Feeling more supported but wishes she knew earlier what to expect. Still concerned about social opportunities.	
Teachers	A	Will contact C.O. about options, including local + residential colleges		
	R	Hopes local college will make accurate assessment 'nightmare' 'no uncertain terms'		
Other professionals	A		Local colleges open place	
	R	V.T. Application starts being a battle. Sometimes is a struggle	C.O. + T write to emphasize A's need for a peer group	

Case Study: Andrew

Decision no.2: Do an electrical engineering course, don't do an electrical engineering course

Decision-making unit	Time 1: A 1/96 P: 2/96 R: 3/96	Time 2: A: 2/97 P: 11/96 R: 3/97	Time 3: 4:3/98
Self	A Wants to be an electrician or a filmstar  R <del>Wants to be an electrician</del> is <del>Wants to be an electrician</del> cannot be filmstar	Still wants to be electrician + helps f. at weekends  Wants to do electrical engineering course	Doing GNVQ Intermediate in Engineering Wants to do electrical engineering course
Parents	A A expressed wish to be an electrician  R Just want A to be happy	A wants to be electrician  Acknowledges A's skill + interest but concerned about his employment prospects. Feels betrayed by school.	
Teachers	A A expresses wish to be an electrician  R Arrange work experience in bank	A wants to be electrician  Doubted about employment prospects of employment activities	
Other professionals	A  R	Wants to do electrical engineering course C.O. suggests general vocational course. Agreed that A. did do GNVQ Intermediate General Engineering course	

# Appendix 13:2

Case Study: Sandra Decision no. 1: Go to residential college / ~~don't~~ Go to local college

Decision-making unit		Time 1: S: 6/2/96 P: 4/96 T: 2/96 R: 5/96	Time 2: S: 4/97 P: 6/97 R: 5/97 T: 6/97	Time 3: R: 2/98 H: 4/98	Time 4: P: 7/98
Self	A  R	  Doesn't want to leave home 'I will miss my Mum + Dad'	'I will go home + stay with my mum + dad. I am having a college at home!'	Visited local college  Visited 2nd local college  Accepted place.	
Parents	A  R	Prefer local college  Anxious about Sam's safety at residential college	S had grand mal seizure  F: Wants to be able to get to her quickly. Not what S. wants. Prefers course at local college  H: Likes time to herself when S. away	Visited local college  Concerned about access, and supervision. Prefers to keep S. at home with carers.  Visited + applied for place	dropped out above first time never where I for place
Teachers	A  R	Prefer residential college Sent info. to parents  Over dependant on parents + needs to make relationship with people own age	Suggested weekly residential to parents  Will be kept as child. 'I think as one of those cyclical things... her parents have had previous experience in determining S's attitude... Sam's never been encouraged to think what about her home!'		
Other professionals	A  R		O: Preferred residential option N: Critical of college's capacity to do accounts inaccessing local adult services. Critical of school's conduct of census, with no clear	Family did not want S. to go to local college  S.O. to arrange with S. to attend needs Arrange visits to college Dr. to be referred to	

# Appendix 13:3

Case Study: James

Decision no.1: Go to residential college / go to local college.

Decision-making unit	Time 1: T 2/96 P 3/96	Time 2: 2/97 R: 5/97 4	Time 3: T 6/97
Self		A Has visited local college Saw video of one res. college (S) Visited Hereford. R. Local college too similar to school. Residential presents greater challenge + increase his independence. Likes College H.	
Parents	A Have seen some information about local residential colleges R Undecided - wants J. to have a qualification	J. has visited College H + they saw stand at careers convention Favour College H. but worried about getting funding.	
Teachers	A R Prefers residential college J. will be isolated in mainstream college.	J. states preference for Hereford. Has to have major surgery T. Must visit other local colleges first (repeated several times)	<del>John's case</del> J. must have major surgery Likely to need more support after surgery + will initially offer programme. Hopes he will go to residential placement
Other professionals			

Case Study: James

Decision no. 1: Residential college (cont.)

Decision-making unit	Time 4: 17/2/98	Time 5: 7/98	Time 6:
Self	<p>A Has visited College S.</p> <p>R Disliked it, difficult to get round in morning to chair</p>	<p>A J. <del>has</del> visited several local colleges. Funding was approved for resid.</p> <p>R. Wants to experience living away from home</p>	
Parents	<p>A G.O. advises James must visit local colleges</p> <p>R concerned about what they can offer</p>	<p>J. + parents visited several local colleges - local colleges sd. did not meet needs.</p> <p>Want J. to go to residential + then local college. Want social aspect of res. college.</p>	
Teachers	<p>A</p> <p>R H.T. says must keep in close touch with C.O.</p>		
Other professionals	<p>A G.O. has sent assessment forms to Hereford. Visits planned to local colleges</p> <p>R G.O. Discuss what local college can offer. Will put case to out. county panel</p>		

O.T. Is quality of care at local colleges + preparation for independent living

# Appendix 13:4

Case Study: *Kevin*

Decision no.1: *Go to youth club/don't go to youth club*

Decision-making unit	Time 1: <i>11/95</i>	Time 2: <i>2/97 Review</i>	Time 3: <i>11/98</i>
Self	<p>A <i>Wants to go to Y.C.</i></p> <p>R. <i>Friend goes</i></p>	<p>A <i>Asks to go to Y.C.</i></p> <p>R <i>Repeats when not heard.</i></p>	
Parents	<p>A <i>K wants to go to Y.C. in term time</i></p> <p>R <i>M. Would get over-tired and might be abused. F. not allowed because she's a teacher</i></p>	<p><i>on a M.T.H. night when I can help all my children</i></p>	<p>M. Inconvenient times which clash with meals.</p>
Teachers		<p><i>Records that M. will look into club attendance.</i></p> <p><i>H.T. Good for m. to spend time with childrens.</i></p>	
Other professionals	<p>A</p> <p>R</p>	<p><i>C.O. Transport can be provided</i></p>	



*Kevin*

*cont.*

Case Study :

Decision no.1:

Decision-making unit	Time 4: <i>31 98 review</i>	Time 5:	Time 6:
Self			
Parents			
Teachers	<i>A Forgot to raise issue at review</i> <i>R Would ask Kevin. Felt Mrs. D. unhappy with school.</i>		
Other professionals			

## **Appendix 14**

### **Lists of Codes – Definitions**

#### **Students**

1. SSP – Self-perceptions of
  - SSP-SW – own strengths and weaknesses
  - SSP-PI –personal interests
  - SSP-P – personality
  - SSP-DI – perceptions of themselves as a disabled person
2. SPA – Personal agency
  - SPA-CAP – belief in capacity to influence events and make own decisions
  - SPA-RE – personal responses to situations
3. SF – Family
  - SF-RM – as role models
  - SF-APP – approval/disapproval
  - SF-SI – siblings
  - SF-SU - support
4. SGE – Gender
5. SETH – Ethnicity
6. SSO – Self and others
  - SSO-DIS – as disabled person in relation to non-disabled people
  - SSO-FR – friends
7. SE – Experiences

- SES – schooling
- SEW – work

8. SME – Medical needs

9. SEX – Expectations of future

- SEX-C – nature of courses
- SEX-ND – access to non-disabled people
- SEX-LS – lifestyle

10. SU – Support

- SU-CU – curriculum
- SU-GU – guidance

## Appendix 15

### The case studies

The following descriptions briefly introduce each student and their families as they were when I first met them at the start of the study. They are intended therefore to provide an initial flavour of the young people and their immediate families, that is those people who made up what I have termed the ‘core’ of the case studies. A postscript has been added to each, stating what they were doing by the end of the study.

**Andrew** is profoundly deaf and relies mainly on sign language for communication. He is fifteen years of age. He has a pleasant open face with an often serious expression when he is concentrating. His family lives in a small country town where his father, Mr Bailey works as an electrician. His mother does not work outside the home. Andrew has one older brother, Jason, who is still at school. Andrew has attended a school for deaf and hearing impaired pupils in a neighbouring county since he was eight and where he is now a weekly boarder. He is in Year 10. The upper school is based in a local secondary school and 30% of Andrew’s timetable is spent in mixed classes with hearing pupils. During these sessions he receives sign language support. He thinks he would like to become an electrician like his father although he also has a secret desire to become a famous film star.

*By the end of the study, Andrew was attending a residential specialist college for the deaf while studying engineering at a local sector college.*

**Costas** is fifteen and lives at home with his parents, an older brother and younger sister. Both his parents, Mr and Mrs Demetrios, had emigrated to England from Cyprus before they were married and now his father works as a transport manager with the Post Office while his mother works from home as a hairdresser. Costas has been at a local all-age school for children with moderate learning difficulties. For four years although he had attended very many different schools before he eventually settled at Marchmount. He goes to the local mainstream school for one morning a week where he is studying for his GCSE art. He would like to have a girlfriend.

*Costas was still at school at the end of the study but was likely to go on to a course at the local college.*

**David** is fourteen years old and attends the same school as Andrew but as a day pupil. A tall good-looking boy with red hair, he is profoundly deaf. He lives at home with his father, Bill Francis, who was a builder but who is taking a degree at a local University. His father is separated from his mother who works as a communicator. He has one older brother who is at college. Mr and Mrs Francis had chosen to move to this particular district because they wanted their child to go to a special school rather than be integrated into their local secondary school which was the policy of their then local education authority. David has two relatives who are also profoundly deaf. David said that he would like to work with animals when he leaves school.

*When David left school he went to a residential specialist college for the deaf.*

**Gavin**, fourteen, is Afro-Caribbean. He lives with his foster mother, Mrs MacBride, who works as a prison officer, and his foster father who is retired and was away in the West Indies. According to Mrs MacBride, Gavin had been taken into care along with his brothers and sisters when he was five. He was however still in touch with his mother whom he visited once a month. He attends a local comprehensive school and had been identified as having emotional and behavioural difficulties. He has a statement of special educational needs and receives support from a member of the LEA's behaviour support service. Peer group support had not worked but he dislikes being withdrawn from lessons so the support teacher saw her role as supporting the teachers rather than giving Gavin direct support. His ambition was to work with animals, to get married and have a dog and a snake as pets.

*I lost contact with Gavin, but he was reported to be living in a squat with Somali asylum seekers.*

**James**, is fifteen and he has been at the same school since he was two and a half years of age. A wheelchair-user, he envisages staying at school for one or two more years. His family home was some fifteen miles away from the school and he boarded on two

nights a week. He has an older and a younger brother. Both his parents, Mr and Mrs Simpson, were employed, his mother part time in a local nursery and his father as a plumber. James saw himself as a very active and sociable person and his ambition had been to become a policeman although he recognised that this was now not likely to be possible. He describes his initial upset at having to come to terms with the fact that such a job would be beyond his capacity and he was now unclear about what he wanted to do although as far as his future lifestyle went he wanted to live on his own in a flat.

*James went on to do a computer course at a residential specialist college for physically disabled students.*

**Kim**, sixteen, lives at home with her parents and her younger twin sister and brother. Kim has straight dark hair and plump features. She has moderate learning difficulties and communication difficulties. After spending several years in the building trade her father, Mr Doyle, became a storeman at a local supermarket. Kim attends a local school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties where she has been since she was five years of age. In September she joined the upper school although as yet her parents do not feel as closely involved as they were when she was lower down in the school. They are very concerned about her travelling independently. Kim would like to work with computers.

*By the end of the study, Kim was about to join a pre-entry level course at her local college of further education.*

**Kylie** is fourteen years of age and in Year 9. She is small and rather shy giving the impression of frailty. Her mother, Mrs Long, is a single parent and, as the eldest child, Kylie has always had to take a lot of responsibility for her three younger brothers. Kylie sees her father quite regularly and goes to spend weekends with him. For quite a long time the family had been homeless and lived in a women's refuge. More recently however they had moved into a house and her mother had a new partner, a local greengrocer with whom she now worked. Because of family circumstances Kylie had changed schools quite frequently but had remained at her current local comprehensive school for two years. She had a statement of special educational needs

having been assessed as having moderate learning difficulties. She does baby-sitting for the next door neighbour every afternoon after school for which she gets paid and in the long run would either like to work with computers or look after children. She expects to go on living at home when she leaves school but would eventually like to find her own place.

*Kylie dropped out of school and after failing to keep a work experience placement remained at home.*

**Malcolm**, fifteen, attends the same school for children with moderate learning difficulties as Kim and Costas. A tall, thin boy with quite a pronounced stammer he lives with his parents on a large council estate in London. He has a younger brother and an older sister and brother who are both married. His father is unemployed and agoraphobic. The family are hoping to be re-housed – the house is damp and infested with rats. When he's not at school he likes to help out at a family business which rents out furniture. He has a bad relationship with his younger brother, who teases him, and Malcolm suffers from severe bouts of uncontrollable anger. When he leaves school he wants to live alone in a 'big house in Enfield with a cat and a dog'. He would also like to work as a deliveryman in his Uncle's firm but is afraid his inability to read maps may prevent him from doing so.

*Malcolm dropped out of school in year 12 and began doing a little work in his uncle's firm. His parents were not convinced that he would sustain this.*

**Maria** is seventeen and has Rhett's Syndrome. Recently she has begun to communicate through eye pointing. She lives for two weeks at a time in a private care home paid for by social services and then one week at home with her parents and younger brother. Her mother, Mrs Constandis, teaches at the local college of further education. Maria goes to a school for children with severe learning difficulties. She seems to get great pleasure from music and dancing (she clapped and rocked excitedly when she saw a video of herself playing a drum) but dislikes her regular sessions of physiotherapy. Her mother anticipates that Maria will probably go to a residential placement when she leaves school, as she is sceptical about the quality of the local provision.

*By the end of the study, Maria was attending a residential care home for young women with Rhett's syndrome.*

**Nasreen** is aged fifteen and a day pupil at a special school for blind and partially sighted pupils. She is taking 9 GCSEs some of which she studies for at a local comprehensive school. She lives with her parents Mrs and Mrs Hussein, her Grandfather and her two older sisters, both of whom are at college. She also has a younger brother, also blind, at the same school as herself. As the fourth girl in the family (she had another sister, also blind who died) she feels that she was a grave disappointment to her family, particularly her father whom she believed had wanted a boy. She is due to leave school at the end of the year and her ambition is to go to Downshire College, a residential specialist college for the blind. In the longer term, her ambition is to become a clinical psychologist and she was considering applications to London, Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

*Nasreen stayed on at her residential specialist college for a third year due to unforeseen medical problems.*

**Sandra**, fifteen, lives with her parents and older brother on a council estate in a town in the Home Counties. Her mother works for an insurance company and her father is unemployed. Sandra has physical disabilities and learning difficulties and goes to a school about twenty miles away for children with physical disabilities. She stays one night a week travelling back and forth on the school bus for the rest of the time. Her best friend is called Nicola who lives nearby and goes out with Sandra on a regular basis to the nearby swimming pool and bowling alley. The whole family are involved in caring for Sandra, including grandparents, aunts and uncles. When asked about the future, Sandra said she would 'miss her Mum and Dad' implying that she thought she would have to go to a residential college. Her mother was adamant however that if Sandra went to college on leaving school it should be close to their home.

*After a good deal of uncertainty, Sandra went on a part-time course at her local further education college where she remains.*



**Stuart** is fourteen and lives on a council estate in one of the London overspill towns built in the fifties. His parents, Mr and Mrs Brown, both work, his mother as a dinner lady in a local primary school and his father as a lorry driver. The middle child, he has an older sister and a younger brother. Physically Stuart is tall for his age and tends to lumber along bumping into things in his path, a fact that seems to land him in trouble at school. He goes to the local comprehensive and although he does not have a statement he receives support for his learning difficulties from the school's learning support team. According to the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) he also has behaviour problems. At weekend he works on the market for one of the stallholders but in the long term he is considering carpentry, although he believes his behaviour may prevent him from achieving his ambitions.

*Stuart got himself a warehouseman's job in a local firm on leaving school and began learning to drive.*

## Appendix 16

**Table 6:1 Family status**

Project name	Mother's job	Father's job	Ethnicity	Housing
Andrew Bailey	Unknown	Electrician	White	Owner/occupier
Costas Demetrios	Hairdresser	Post Office transport manager	Greek Cypriot	Owner/occupier
David Francis	BSL Communicator	Construction worker and university student	White	Council house
Gavin Stone	Foster mother: Prison officer Birth mother: Unknown	Foster father: Unknown Birth father: Unknown	Afro-Caribbean	Unknown
James Simpson	Nursery nurse	Plumber and then made redundant	White	Owner/occupier
Kim Doyle	Classroom assistant	Supermarket store man	White	Council house
Kylie Long	Various – shop assistant; barmaid	Unknown	White	Council house
Malcolm Lewis	Full-time housewife	Unemployed	White	Council house
Maria Contandis	FE lecturer	Unknown	Greek-Cypriot	Council house
Nasreen Hussein	Full-time housewife	Self-employed	Pakistani	Owner/occupier
Sandra Harding	Personnel assistant	Unemployed	White	Council house
Stuart Brown	School dinner lady	Lorry driver	White	Council house

**Teachers interviewed as part of the study**

**Appendix 17**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Case Study Pupils</b>	<b>Name of School</b>	<b>Type of School</b>	<b>Post</b>	<b>Years teaching</b>	<b>No. of times interviewed</b>
Mrs Corby	John and Sandra	St. Peters	Physical Disability	Head of FE Unit	29	2
Joan Evans	Nasreen	St. Faiths	Blind and Visual Impaired	Year 11 Teacher	21	1
Mel Grant	Kim, Malcolm and Costas	Marchmount	Moderate Learning Difficulties	Years 12 and 13 Class Teacher	7	1
Joyce Gray	Kylie and Stuart	Highfields	Comprehensive	SENCO	22	3
Ann James	David and Andrew	Greenfield	Deaf and Hearing Impaired	Leavers Teacher	12	2
Alice Jones	Maria	Maisemore	Severe Learning Difficulties	Class Teacher	8	2
Freda Lyons	Malcolm and Costas	Marchmount	Moderate Learning Difficulties	Year 11 Class Teacher	5	1
Sam Smiley	Malcolm and Costas	Marchmount	Moderate Learning Difficulties	Year 10	12	1
Lucy Smith	Gavin	Avondale	Comprehensive	Peripatetic Support Teacher (EBD)	13 (3 as support teacher)	2
Sue Stapelton	John and Sandra	St. Peters	Physical disability	Year 11	18	1

## Appendix 18

### Questionnaire Responses Expectations of annual and transitional reviews

#### Parents

	1 <sup>st</sup> Review	2 <sup>nd</sup> Review
Mother	(Yr 11) What we do in 6 <sup>th</sup> form and progress this year	
Mother	(Yr 10) Does not know Reading	
Mother	(Yr 10) More information from LEA on FE	
Mother	(Yr 11) Confirm Kim can stay at school until she is 19.	
Father		(Yr 10) Thought might be some decisions. Might discuss funding and leaving and which college he might go to.
Mother		(Yr 12) Given up hope.

#### Other Professionals

	1 <sup>st</sup> Review	2 <sup>nd</sup> Review
CO	(Yr 9) Indication of special needs and appropriateness of statement. Awareness of option choices, some idea about career direction.	

SW	(Yr 9) To work without support teacher.	
CO		(Yr 12) Plans for future placement and specifically next year.
OT		(Yr 12) Plan to prepare S and her parents for leaving St. Peters.
CO		(Yr 11) Post-16 plans. Andrew to make decisions because of application deadlines.
CO		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Yr 10) Does not expect decisions to be made</li> <li>• opportunity to highlight issues</li> <li>• review is one part of a decision-making process</li> </ul>
SEN Officer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Yr 10) Not expecting decisions</li> <li>• opportunity to explore options</li> </ul>
T	Yr 10 Sharing information re progress Explain move to Upper School; continue to involve parents in reading support.	
HT	Yr 10 Update on progress Sharing information Set priorities for coming year	
DHT	Yr 11 Confirm staying at school That parents understand what will happen in 16+ class. Plan for leaving school. Specific goals for next year.	Yr 12 Plan for leaving. Alert to areas needing attention.
T		Yr 12 Plans and recommendations for next year.

	1 <sup>st</sup> Review	2 <sup>nd</sup> Review
T/HT	(Yr 11) Goals for next 12 months.	
HT	(Yr 10 ) Update of progress. Sharing info between school/parents. Priorities for next year.	
T	(Yr 10) Shared goals.	
T	(Yr 9) Accept help from ST in behaviour control.	
SENCO	(Yr 9) Review statement. Complete transition plan.	
T	(Yr 10) Targets for next 12 months. Discuss post-16 options. Raise LEA's awareness of student intentions particularly as student may wish to go to out-county placement. Transition plan to commence.	
T		Accept review statement. Make additional comments. No decisions – just explore views and feelings.
HT		Options for post-school provision clarified. Set priorities for next year.
T		Post -9 placement.
CA		Agreement on post-19 placement

**Whose decision?**  
**Factors which affect the decision-making process at 14+ for**  
**students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.**

*Interim report on findings : 1995/96*

## **Introduction**

This paper summarises the main findings at the end of the first year of a three year study of the experiences of transition of young people with special educational needs as they prepare to leave school and those of their families.

## **Methodology**

With the assistance of their schools 14 young people, eight boys and six girls, and their families were invited to participate in the study. Students were chosen who, broadly speaking, were due to leave school in three years' time. Apart from one, all pupils have statements of special educational needs and attend either special or mainstream schools. Three pupils are partially or fully residential. The students have a range of disabilities and/or learning difficulties including hearing or visual loss, physical impairment, profound and complex learning difficulties, moderate to severe learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The two local authorities in which the schools are located operate within very different contexts. The first is an outer London borough with extremes of poverty and wealth, while the second is a relatively prosperous shire county.

As far as possible interviews were held with all students and their parents and teachers before the annual reviews. In three cases this was not possible and interviews were conducted retrospectively. It has not been possible to interview two sets of parents. Observations of seven annual reviews have been conducted and follow-up questionnaires circulated to all professionals attending the meeting. Telephone interviews were held with parents following the meetings.

## Initial Findings

At this stage findings have been analysed against the recommendations of the Code of Practice (1994) on the involvement of parents and young people. These suggest that at the first annual review after the young person's 14th birthday a Transition Plan should be drawn up which, among other things, should address the following questions:

*'What are the young person's hopes and aspirations for the future and how can these be met?*

*What information do young people need in order to make informed choices?*

*How can young people be encouraged to contribute to their own Transition Plan and make positive decisions about the future?*

*What do parents expect of their son's or daughter's adult life?*

*Will parents experience new care needs and require practical help in terms of aids, adaptations or general support during these years?*

The Code recommends that the annual review meeting must be convened by the LEA. The Careers service must be invited as must the young person's parents or carers. The LEA must also ensure that other providers such as Social Services are aware of the review and any relevant procedures. Finally, *'the view of young people themselves should be sought and recorded wherever possible in any assessment, re-assessment or review during the years of transition.'*

- *The views of the young people*

All students apart from one, Maria, who has profound and complex learning difficulties, had views about several aspects of their future lives. Some aspirations relate to employment.

*'To work in a bike shop'* (David, aged 15)

*'Wouldn't mind being a carpenter'* (Wayne, aged 13)

*'Look after children'* (Karen, aged 14)

*'I would like to be a police officer.... I have always wanted to be (a policeman) since I was a little kid.'* (Gavin, aged 15)



*'I would like to be a psychologist'* (Sahir, aged 16)

Some describe where they want to live:

*'Live in a big house in Enfield.. a garden and a dog'* (Christopher, aged 15)

While others express their hopes through their fears:

*'(I) will miss my Mum and Dad'* (Clare, aged 15)

A number of students, however, felt that their particular disability or learning difficulty would prevent or hinder the achievement of their aspirations. For example Gavin felt that being a wheel chair user would prevent his being able to join the police force while Wayne said that his behaviours might interfere with his goal of becoming a carpenter.

When asked about their fears for the future students mentioned leaving home and growing old or dying. Mary said that she did not want to have to work as hard as her father while Stewart feared having to look after his mother.

Pupils mentioned that they wanted to know 'what is college like?', what their options were and what training or qualifications they needed. But on the whole students were very unclear about their information needs. Several had gleaned information from family, friends or siblings and knew, for example, that going to college was one way to get training.

#### • *The view of the parents*

By contrast parent had more fears and fewer aspirations than their offspring. Their aspirations were also far less specific, most mentioning happiness as their over-riding desire for their child's future. Other ambitions included getting a trade and doing something worthwhile rather than a dead-end job.

The fears of parents mainly related to their children's safety. Concerns about social isolation and bullying were expressed particularly by the parents of the pupils with hearing impairment.

Five sets of parents expressed anxieties about their children's level of basic skills fearing that this would prevent them from achieving a qualification and getting a worthwhile job. They feared their children would either be unemployed or in unskilled work.

Having no choice about when their child leaves school or their destination concerned the parents of two children with complex care needs and learning difficulties.

Parents tended to rely on personal experience for information. They wanted more explanation of certain terms used by schools in describing their child's attainments such as the meaning of levels in the National Curriculum. They also wanted to know whether students do work experience and what the students do on their college link courses.

With one exception, whose daughter was in her last year at school they did not know about the Code of Practice nor of the expectation that certain procedures should be followed for planning their son or daughter's transition from school to post-school provision. They wanted more information on the options open to their children and advice about benefits and funding. With the exception of Maria's family, contact with Social Services was minimal although in once case a letter had been sent inviting the family to contact Social Services if they required advice. However, the family had not done so because they were upset by the term 'handicapped' used to describe their child in the letter.

Information on what happens to school leavers who do not get jobs was requested by one father. He felt that the school only described their successes.

Parents also wanted advice on how to support their child. For example, the parents of Gavin and Christopher mentioned that they would like their sons to get a Saturday job but needed some advice on what sort of work they should look for. Clare's mother wanted her to join in with local social activities such as swimming at the local pool. Jo's father needed some advice on ways of coping with his son's own concerns about his sexuality and the teasing he was receiving from local children. Help with behaviour management was also mentioned particularly in coping with changing relationships between siblings.

The most frequently mentioned sources of advice and support was the school and/or voluntary or parent organisations. Written information was helpful especially if written in plain language. Michael O'Grady had spent a day in his daughter Mary's school and such visits were generally held to be useful. Parents' evenings which introduced parents to the schools' sixth forms or careers convention were seen as valuable sources of information. However, it was considered more helpful when these were held before the Annual Review Meetings where options and next steps could be discussed from a more informed perspective.

However, thinking about the future was not something that parents necessarily found easy and as one mother said, 'To tell the truth we don't plan..... we go from day to day'.

- *Annual Review and Transition Planning Meetings*

As this was the first Annual Review since the introduction of formalised transition planning no student was in possession of a plan in spite of the fact that the majority of students were 15 or over. Of those meetings attended the ages of the students were as follows:

<i>Stewart,</i>	14 years
<i>Christopher,</i>	15 years
<i>Alistair,</i>	15 years
<i>Clyde,</i>	15 years
<i>Clare,</i>	16 years
<i>Gavin,</i>	16 years
<i>Maria,</i>	18 years

Both LEAs offered guidance on the issues which should be addressed during the meeting by providing a list of questions to follow although in the case of the out-county pupil this was not available. In this instance both parents and the school felt that they were at a serious disadvantage in planning because of the lack of information on procedures and options.

In only one instance was the Careers Service represented at the meeting although arrangements for meeting the specialist careers officer were discussed on two occasions.

Students were generally present and at one school the views of both of the pupils on their progress had been recorded and discussed at the meeting. Another school showed a video of the students' achievements. Parents were also present at every meeting.

The focus of the meetings was generally on reviewing progress made during the past year and discussing targets for the following year. On the whole, much more time was spent on reviewing than on planning, either short of longer term targets. Any decisions which were made tended to relate to targets for behaviour, literacy or next year's curriculum options. All students in special schools with FE units attached will continue on into these at 16. In most instances it was considered too early to begin to make decisions about post-school placements.

Participants at the meetings were asked to comment on the effectiveness of the meetings in terms of enabling them to contribute, the information they gained and in clarifying what action they had to take as a result of the meeting. While almost all school staff described the meetings as satisfactory or better, three sets of parents expressed dissatisfaction with the meetings on all counts.

## **Discussion**

An initial analysis of this data supports McGinty and Fish's (1992) observation that transition consists of two different but complementary dimensions - the administrative phases of education and training and the processes of adolescent development.

The administrative procedures associated with this phase or period of education are marked by various formal, administrative arrangements and are described by the Code of Practice. They include:

- ◆ Assessment arrangements such as annual reviews, NRAs, KS 3 and 4 tests, formal examinations, inter-agency assessments, FEFC assessments. Sustaining a sensible balance between the expectations of examining, accrediting and funding bodies and the educational needs of individuals presents a considerable challenge.
- ◆ Curriculum arrangements such as link courses, careers interviews and action planning, deciding on KS4 options, making post-16 choices. Changes in the curriculum and organisation of post-16 provision and the demise of school/college link programmes appears to have diminished opportunities for certain groups of young people with SEN.
- ◆ Information giving events eg careers conventions, visits. Different influences and constraints come into play depending on where the young person is living and learning.
- ◆ Funding arrangements and demands made by different phases and services. Changes resulting from government reforms have altered procedures and criteria.
- ◆ Inter-agency procedures such as the Social Services 14+ assessments. Services are based on different legislation and have different cultures and patterns of inter- and intra-agency relationships.

The socio-psychological processes which characterise this period for young people and their families include:

- ◆ The development of a sense of themselves as young adults and how they and their families and teachers construe the possibilities for the future (Oyserman and Markus 1990). Aspirations and the formulation of aspirations may be circumscribed, as for all of us, by a number of factors which include individual stages of development gender, financial considerations, cultural expectations, home and family influences, self-esteem and self-perception. For this group of young people their aspirations may also be circumscribed by their individual responses and that of others to their disability or learning difficulty. For example a number of students described what they wanted to do had they not had a disability.
- ◆ Coping with family upheavals and anxieties associated with transitional periods (Pell and Cohen 1995). This includes parents having to confront fears about the long term future and the impact of the child's disability on their own as well as their children's lives. A number of parents described how they preferred not to plan or think about the future. However others wanted to know well in advance what would happen and the courses of action open to them.

The bridge or link between the formal, administrative procedures and the young people and their families rests with professionals and how they understand and interpret the Code's guidance. Weatherley (1979) researching the impact of Public Law 94-142 in the United States, noted the personal standpoints and strategies adopted by professionals in managing their work loads. This affected their interactions with other professionals and their pupils which in turn affected how they chose to interpret policy.

Professional hierarchies may also affect decisions at the transition stage. Professionals from different agencies possess different levels of knowledge and commitment towards the Code of Practice which affects the interpretation of their roles and responsibilities in its implementation. There is now some limited evidence to suggest that there is a gap between the guidance and procedures laid down by the Code of Practice, how these are being interpreted and young people's and their parents actual needs and experiences. This leads to a number of questions.

- ◆ What is the nature of this gap between policy, practice and experience?

- ◆ Are any changes or modifications required to the Code of Practice e.g. in the relation to the timing of transition planning?
- ◆ How do professionals from different services interpret their roles in relation to the Code and how does this affect their interactions with young people and parents during transition from school to post-school provision?
- ◆ How can young people and their parents be better supported and meaningfully involved during the transition planning process?
- ◆ How can schools build on existing curriculum initiatives and legislative demands to improve practice?
- ◆ How can professionals be better supported in understanding and using the guidance on transition?

*Lesley Dee*  
*January 1997*

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